

Leaves from Indian Forests



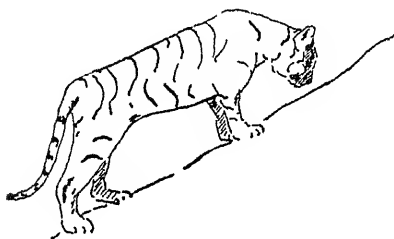
THE PARK

Leaves from Indian Forests

By

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Author of 'Forest Life and Sport in India,'
'The Life of a Tiger,' 'The Life of an Elephant,' etc.



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PREFACE

THESE sketches, jotted down at intervals of twenty-five years' service in India, have been collected in the hope that they may recall to some of my husband's many associates and friends in work and sport the happy days of pre-war India. Thanks are due to the Editors of *The Field*, *Land and Water*, *The Pioneer*, etc., for the permission to reproduce them; and to my daughter, Mrs. Dummett, for the pen-and-ink illustrations in the text. The plates are reproductions of my own photographs.

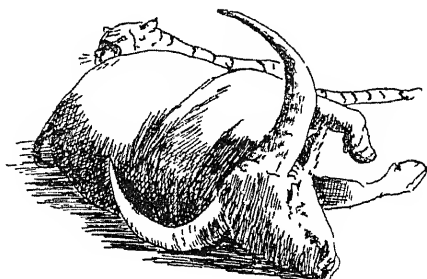
MABEL EARDLEY-WILMOT.

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CHAPTER I

A Night in the Forest

THE shikaris have left you to your fate though you still hear their footsteps through the dry grass and leaves of the forest, and their voices expressing the hope that your vigil will be successful or enlarging on the size of the tiger they have tracked to his kill. You are perched in the fork of a large tree on the edge of a vast plain. A light framework secured at its four corners permits repose and affords room for rifles, cartridges and blanket. The sun is setting ; the sky above is a steely blue, warming into yellow and orange where in the north it rests on the summits of the Himalaya. The snowy peaks stretch away to right hand and left, smooth and rounded or rising abruptly, showing black where the precipices afford no hold for the eternal snow. From some of these peaks white banners are flying, the snow powder looks like smoke in its horizontal flight. The mountains are flushed with rosy red save

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in the distance where, already abandoned by the sun's rays, they show dead white against the sky.

The plain seems as if washed with grey olive green. The sprouting grass, the ashes of the last forest fire, the stiff charred stems that remain standing blend into harmony, broken only by the rich brown of the scattered ant-hills ; emphasized, in the distance, by the fleecy mist already rising in the hollows, and nearer by the crimson bloom of the ground orchis and the fluffy whiteness of flowering grasses. The plain has a setting of emerald green. It is surrounded by dense forests stretching away towards the hills, their colour merging into purples and blues until suddenly traversed by the band of rosy snow. The verdure of the forest is wonderful in its detail ; the foliage is in all shades of yellow, green and red ; the stems are grey, black, pale green, even white ; the colours mingle and produce an impression of shadow and loneliness.

The plain too is solitary ; no breeze stirs in the forest, there is no signs either of the work or habitation of man. Here and there are dotted groups of deer silently grazing ; a wild boar trots stiffly across the open, little clouds

of dust rise on his track and the setting sun turns these into gold ; his blackness shows as a beauty spot on the fair face of the jungle. The sunlight dies suddenly away. The black partridge utters his last defiant crow, satisfied to put off till to-morrow his perpetual feud with his rivals ; the peafowl cease grazing, and one by one flap heavily to their roosting places ; a belated vulture swoops irresistibly from the heights and alights with a jerk on a neighbouring tree. The sky takes on a hue of the deepest blue, the mountains cease to invite with their beauty, a faint air laden with sickly perfumes passes over the murmuring forest and the stars appear trembling in the dewy air.

You feel a longing for companionship and shelter. The plain in the darkness seems crowded with unknown dangers, it repels where so shortly before you had delighted in its open freedom, it lies now a dusky waste surrounded by the blackness of the forest. The silence is for a time intense, it is an interval, the moment of awakening of those birds and beasts whose day is our darkness. Soon strange noises compel attention, your senses are painfully on the alert, imagination magnifies the slightest rustling of a dead leaf into a heavy footfall,

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the metallic note of the night-jar close at hand comes as a shock. But you become gradually accustomed to the gloom, you note with interest the silent passing of the forest owl, the gentle whistling of the flying squirrels, it even seems homelike when the peafowl stir uneasily on their perches and utter guttural sounds of discontent. A herd of deer passes looking weird in the dim light, cropping rapidly at the tender grass, almost indistinguishable in their shadowy movements, the soft bleating of the fawns is heard as they hurry to and fro, and the gentle grunts of the anxious mothers ; in the distance a pair of jackals now rend the air with their cries, and a faint yapping proclaims the presence of wild dogs.

Slowly towards the right the forest is becoming luminous, a band of light shines on the limited horizon, the tree trunks are cut out in blackness as the moon, slowly rising, silvers the glistening leaves and illuminates the misty plain. The forest appears to acknowledge the Queen of Night, and again a great stillness reigns around, the dripping of the dew soothes to rest, and wrapped in your blankets you sleep not soundly but watchfully as a wild animal.

On awakening your faculties are at once on

the alert. It seems as if you had heard a sound, but whether in a dream or not is undetermined. You listen motionless, almost giving up hope before in the far distance the roar of a tiger is twice repeated, the sound seems to roll across the plain and is faintly echoed in the forest, a few deer utter cries of alarm or warning and the peacock, from his point of vantage, trumpets his defiance. The tiger is far away, it may be a mile or more, he has evidently no wish to conceal himself, he may be hungry and therefore angry, or returning thanks after meals, or yearning for the society of his mate. The spirit of the hunter is aroused, the rifle is placed ready to hand as if at any moment the tiger might appear. But after a pause of tense expectation hope fades slowly away. The roaring is still heard at intervals, but seems to approach no nearer, you sit listlessly looking out over the plain now bathed in brightest moonlight ; it would seem that no movement could escape your notice.

Away to the left a wavering light attracts attention, it advances in curves along the edge of the plain like a gigantic snake. At times the shadows swallow it up, but this mystery always emerges and continues its steady progress.

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No knowledge of woodcraft avails here to explain this phenomenon, and with a beating heart the rifle once more is grasped and preparation made to face the unknown.

The mysterious creature is now only fifty yards distant, now only ten ; it is puzzling, almost alarming. There is a swerve to the left, and as the light passes into shadow the dark outline of a tiger becomes distinctly visible. The joy of intense excitement is now your own, your pulses throb and tingling fingers close with an iron grip. The heavy breath of your quarry is audible as fifteen feet below he investigates the marks of men, the slight disturbances you have necessarily caused when settling yourself in your perch. He grumbles deeply, and the fear that he will not approach the kill and give you a chance is intense, you feel almost as if a year of your life would be cheap payment for a shot at this mighty beast. And then as you gaze downwards a head slowly comes into your line of view, one more step and he is yours.

The next instant the report of a rifle reverberates through the forest, a struggling mass of yellow and white is at your feet ; amidst clouds of dust you hear the sound of mighty blows,

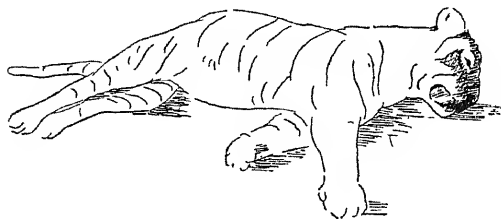
there is a roar and a rush ; a second shot is fired, and silently the smoke passes in eddies drifting through the trees, wreathing the tall grasses. But at the edge of the plain in the light of the moon lies a silver tiger looking as if carved out of frosted metal.

The excitement is over, the rifle is reloaded, but there is no thought of shooting less noble game. A little breeze springs up heralding the dawn, the forest sighs as if in relief, the moon becomes dimmer and a pallor is spreading over the East, the hills are showing indistinctly white against the indigo sky, a peak is suddenly tinged with the rays of the rising sun, and soon the snowy range towers in brilliance above the still sleeping forest. The mists on the plain are blown here and there in soft clouds, beneath there are glimpses of deer returning slowly towards the forest depths, the tiger has changed from silver to gold, and his massive form, his mighty head is noted with joy.

And now a distant call greets your ear. "Is it well?" is asked, and you reply, "It is well, you may come." The shikaris hasten breathless with excitement and you join the group, relating your experiences, admiring the trophy, almost regretting his death. More

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men arrive, there is a hubbub of voices as the tiger is loaded on the unwilling elephant ; you stand aside, the spirit of the forest is on you still, the chattering and disturbance is distasteful, it seems as if you had dwelt for years solitary amongst the beauties and dangers of the jungle. Reluctantly you return to camp, to mankind and to work.



CHAPTER II

A Summer Morning

IT has been a restless night ; the south-west wind laden with dust carried with it also irritation and sleeplessness until the commencement of a new day, and even now standing in the darkness an hour before dawn fitful gusts of warm breath still pass over the forest. The sky is black, but the stars gain in brilliancy by the contrast ; they shed a soft light over the landscape, you can see but not distinguish.

You leave the sleeping camp and follow a footpath skirting the forest, on the one hand a wall of vegetation, on the other an open plain, vague and mysterious. From time to time the little path wanders, scarcely visible in the shade through the trees ; it emerges with a feeling of relief and freedom. Strange sounds assail you, the rustling of dry leaves in the forest, the hurrying of pattering feet in the plain ; each moment as the darkness lessens you recognize objects which shortly before filled

you with curiosity or surprise ; while rejoicing that your world will soon emerge from gloom you anticipate with distaste the glaring light and heat of day, and grudge each moment of dusky coolness as it slips away. Your companion, khaki-clad and silent, carries the heavy rifle, your hand closes with a comforting grip round the lighter weapon ; wandering breezes fan your face, bringing with them strange and transient perfumes, indescribably sweet or unpleasantly overpowering.

In the east the sky takes on the hue of a pink pearl, the woolly mists in the low ground assume fascinating curves, and you halt as from the tree above a peacock utters a discordant cry in anticipation of another day of courtship and display. He looks at you with sidelong glances of surprise and pity, he himself has no intention of descending from his roosting-place until he has alertly scanned the surrounding country, then when the dew has dried sufficiently not to soil his plumage, when he is certain that no wild beast is in the vicinity to rush him ere he can commence his heavy flight, he extends his rufous wings and slides swiftly to earth, an azure comet with golden tail ! We leave him to his wary circumspection ; our

object is to see and not be seen, to startle no wild beast so that his alarm cry may proclaim the presence of an enemy, to advance cautiously, taking advantage of every chance of concealment, to convey by sight or scent no suspicion of danger to the watchful animals around us.

And yet at the onset we almost ruin our prospect of amusement for the morning when passing slowly round a turn in the path we observe a dusky form standing statuesque in the uncertain shadow of the trees. It is a sambhar hind; she regards us intently, her broad ears immovable, her moist and shiny muzzle twitching as she inhales the polluted air. Her brown calf pushes uneasily against his mother, he wishes an explanation of this intrusion, he is waiting for an order to fly. We pass stedfastly forward hoping that she will not arouse the forest with her deep-toned note, then looking back notice her moving slowly away, the hair erected on back and tail, undecided whether or not she has done her duty in the unusual circumstances.

In the plain groups of animals are grazing. These are swamp deer in their summer dress of bright rufous with lighter spots; when dis-

turbed they trot with high action or fly in bounds through the grass. Their refuge is in impenetrable swamps, they pass over quick-sands aided by their long wide-spreading hoofs, in winter they appear in overcoats of a shaggy grey and the stag is then magnificent with antlers of twelve or fourteen points. Now watch him join the herd, his body burnished in the slanting light, his massive horns edged with silver reflections from the soft brown velvet. He moves carefully through the grass, but seems stupid in his fatness, he depends on the hinds for protection ; in a few months none will be warier than he.

At a short distance amongst the forest trees the crows are calling vociferously, the leader of the concert is bending forward with fluttering wings and tail depressed, the inflated throat and wide-opened beak proclaim the intensity of his feelings ; it is astonishing what volumes of sound proceed from his small excited body. The others take short flights and again alight in the vicinity shouting their parts with spirit. We advance with caution, noisily welcomed by the crows ; you feel they would rejoice if you unexpectedly stepped into the jaws of a tiger.

A small heap of leaves and grass hastily scratched together invites attention, beneath are the remains of a hog-deer partially eaten, the skin drawn back artistically ; no butcher can flay more scientifically than the panther who, unlike his larger cousin, dislikes hair in his food and needs no such stimulant to his digestion. We cover up the kill carefully, and make a note to return that evening before the panther arrives and perchance surprise him with an unexpected greeting ; then continuing our progress along the edge of the forest notice, as we pass a stagnant pool, a wild pig surrounded by her numerous family. She is busily intent on her morning meal, digging sturdily in the soft mud, paying small heed to the gambols of her little ones. Their brown striped bodies are never still, they chase each other hither and thither with squeaks and grunts ; with the hasty temper of their family quarrelling is incessant, they stand and strike each other viciously with their soft baby muzzles. A porcupine to whom this disturbance is obnoxious steals silently away, his great nose on the ground ; at the least suspicion of being followed he will charge furiously backwards and impale or blind his enemy ;

for what is in front his eyes and ears will give information.

And now at last we arrive at the object of our quest. In a silent bay in the forest there is a herd of spotted deer; some are lying down, others securing hasty mouthfuls of the succulent herbage ere they proceed to cover for the day. Through the glass we can make out many stags continually on the move, sparring with their equals or pursuing their inferiors; it is a pretty sight, but the herd contains no trophy and we are content to watch, secure from observation behind an anthill.

Suddenly one of the lesser stags breaks the silence with a shrill cry of defiance. The reply is almost instantaneous, it booms three times repeated from the forest, ending in a hoarse roar. The hinds look anxiously in the direction of the sound, the stags move uneasily away, they are securing their retreat, they have no desire to have their communications cut off. See how the head of the herd approaches! His body is black above, fading into bright chestnut and into yellow as it meets the white of his belly, his hide is flecked with rows of spots of purest white. He stands at the verge

of the forest and repeats his challenge, his antlers lowered, the hair erect on his swollen neck ; you can distinguish the semicircular patch of white on his throat and the V-shaped mark on his handsome head.

The herd consider that it is time to retire for the day, they commence slowly sauntering towards the forest, the stag is rounding up his harem and, as he turns broadside towards us, the little rifle speaks. He acknowledges the blow with a slight start, you would not imagine that he has received his death-wound as he walks majestically away ; his companions uneasily close around and prevent another shot, they cannot locate the slight report, there is no smoke to attract attention. We wait for a time to permit the departure of the herd without unnecessary alarm, and then following the trail, almost hoping that the noble beast is unhurt, find our quarry stretched dead upon the grass. His six-tined antlers are massive and long, they are red with the bark of trees he has burnished against, the white points are sharp and unbroken, he has evidently found no superior in the battle-field this summer. We cover him carefully up and press on to the end of our walk ; a yellow haze is rising in the

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west proclaiming that in a short time the hot wind will be again raging in dusty fury over the land. So, reaching the rendezvous, we mount the eager pony and let him make what haste he will to the shelter and comfort of camp, where for the next six hours at least we gladly hide from the heat and light.



CHAPTER III

On the Trail

“THE bullet has hit him,” remarks the head tracker as he offers a leaf on which one tiny spot of blood glistens. The man is a picture as he stands, tall and thin; his khaki clothing hangs loosely on him; you can find no fault with those regular, clear-cut features set off by the short curling beard; his deep brown eyes have the alertness and self-confidence of one accustomed to forest life; if his green turban is removed the luxuriant hair descends in waves to his neck; the face is that of a saint, the figure expresses asceticism and endurance, he is evidently a man to respect and trust. His assistant, with blanket on shoulder and axe in hand, is poring over the ground, he is learning to read the signs of the forest; it comes almost as hard to him as the mastery of a book to a child.

We three are standing in a forest glade in the early morning; the dew still glistens on

the grass and the stately trees shut out the sunshine. The wild animals have reached their resting-places, the birds have not yet returned from the daily quest for food, it is silent and lonesome. There is nothing in the locality to suggest a tragedy, yet last evening we were on this spot face to face with a tiger : a hurried shot, a hasty rush through the forest, and then darkness prevented any further investigation. Now the leaves have been brushed aside from the ground at our feet and disclose the marks of two great paws, each showing where the five claws have cut deeply into the yielding soil. "I think he is hit far back," adds the head tracker ; he picks up a few hairs and examines them critically. "Better take up the trail," we say, and silently he turns his face towards the hills.

The work is easy enough for the first hundred yards : the undergrowth is crushed in the wild flight of the ponderous animal, the foot-marks are conspicuous, the sand has been thrown high on the leaves, the dews of the night have not sufficed to wash them clean. "Here he fell," says the tracker laconically, and even we read the signs easily : a lurch against a sapling in his haste, a furrow ploughed in the dry

was the tiger crouched, with his head between his forepaws. A hasty shot was fired which passed through the paw, missing the head ! The tiger reared up and hit with his paw at the man in the howdah, ripping the cane work from the side close to the man's leg ; he then crossed the stream and walked through the dinner tables of the travellers who scattered in all directions. The tiger took no notice, but passed along the stream and settled down in a small patch of grass and trees on its bank.

The final scene was now set. The attackers comprised a magnificent tusker in the prime of youth. He feared nothing on this earth ; gentle and more amenable than a lamb at one moment, the next under insult or injury a raging tornado destroying everything within reach. Next, his mahout, who distrusted rightly the inexperience and skill of the sportsman. Then the said sportsman, ignorant and eager, and lastly the orderly, whose rôle was to say nothing and bear everything.

The plan was to keep the stream between tiger and attackers, and so irritate the enemy that he would charge across the water and get shot in the sortie. The plan failed. The tiger was invisible, but his stronghold was searched

with shot cartridges and not a sound or movement was detected.

Reluctantly the attackers crossed the stream and advanced in the open. Then the tiger came forth, grim and ferocious. The mahout at once turned the elephant and fled, the tiger pursuing, but before he could reach his victim the elephant took charge, and with lowered tusks turned on his pursuer. The tiger fled back to his stronghold, and the elephant in his wild career took the howdah under a horizontal bough. The howdah collapsed, the half-inch iron bars were tied in knots, two broken guns fell on the ground; the sportsman remained hanging on the bough, the orderly's head stuck out amidst the wreckage.

Laboriously the sportsman ascended the tree and contemplated the outraged tiger a few feet below. The elephant retired and was relieved of the howdah, he returned and picked up rifles and other débris and then stood below for the sportsman to drop on to his back.

Then was the moment when the tiger might have had full revenge in a general mêlée and slaughter, but he let it pass and the melancholy outfit returned home having had the worst of

it, the Gujar was contemptuous and others who were not present amused.

The tiger was shot some weeks after, and his paw and skin revealed the ill-treatment he had suffered. The whole business was amateurish in the extreme, but all the same there were other accidents even many years after.

In this case the mahout was at fault ; he turned the elephant who was quite capable of killing the tiger unassisted even by rifle fire for which no opportunity was given. Had the branch been a little lower all three of the attackers would have been killed.

II

A winter sky in the East, of transparent amber in the short interval between sunset and nightfall, a faint breeze swaying the slender saplings scattered over the forest. They trembled at the slightest draught. There was no horizon, the forest extended on every side silent and mysterious. A dead buffalo lay on the sandy warm soil, somewhat pathetic after the moments of dread and agony which had freed him from years of dolorous servitude to unsympathetic men.

The sportsman was precariously perched on

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a rough seat fixed between two of the restless young trees and about twelve feet from the ground. He was thinking that he was easily visible from a considerable distance, and that the movement of his perch prevented all accuracy of fire and therefore of self-defence.

Through the deep silence came a growling, approaching nearer, and to one accustomed to the voices of the wild, indicating ill temper and a warning. Then in the distance a tiger became visible, walking without circumspection, ready and even willing for a fight, disgusted with surroundings and life in general. This was not a beast to permit too close a view of the sportsman whom he would have rejoiced to pluck from his perch, quite fearless in his anger.

The sportsman waited with raised rifle until there was some lull in the evening breeze, and then fired at the tiger facing him. An impossible shot, only justified by the temper of the tiger and the insecurity of the position.

The tiger retreated growling loudly ; he had not seen his assailant who descended thanking God that for the moment he was rid of a knave. His night's rest was broken with the recurring knowledge that he must single-handed follow

up a tiger which even unwounded was an unpleasant antagonist.

In the early morning tracking began. There was no blood, but a ring of cut hair proved that the bullet had hit, and a drop or two of watery fluid showed that a bone had been broken. Tracking proceeded slowly for over an hour when the broad bed of an ancient water-course was reached. It was now a sea of green grasses, some ten feet high, in it anything smaller than an elephant became invisible. A small stunted tree reared a despondent head above the more vital vegetation, and on the topmost twig perched a solitary crow.

The tracker and the sportsman looked at each other, there was no need of speech, for the tiger was located. The tracker mounted the elephant and took the spare rifle. There was no howdah, they sat on a "pad" on a level with the mahout. None of the three was enjoying himself for the grass was higher than the elephant and the ground could not be seen. They approached the tree warily. The tiger could not see his pursuers, he charged at the sound and missed; the sportsman could not see the tiger, he fired at the sound and missed. The elephant followed the moving

grass, the tiger stopped and waited, then with a roar he sprang at the elephant; standing on his hind legs, he clasped both the elephant's fore-legs and bit savagely at chest and shoulders. The elephant did her best to obey the word of command, she moved forward one pace and the tiger lay on his back beneath her, biting and clawing her belly, another step and he was between her hind legs, still doing his worst on the inside of her thighs.

It was at this moment that the tracker at the back remarked that he could see part of the tiger; it was the first time that day that a glimpse of this enraged brute had been possible. The sportsman lay face down on the pad, the tracker holding him by his belt, and leaning over the elephant's rump, saw two hind legs and a piece of white stomach showing, the rest of the tiger was engaged in doing all the damage it could contrive. Taking the heavy rifle in one hand the sportsman reached as far as possible towards the brute and fired. The elephant was free, she walked out of the grass and stood in the open, red with blood. To get her over the few miles on to camp before wounds stiffened or flies bred maggots was the first consideration, and next to tend her on arrival, for she

had some twenty bites and scratches and each of these formed an abscess, which, later on, had to be lanced; the bite in the shoulder formed a sinus about eighteen inches long, which had to be opened through the thick hide with amputation knives. The charge of the patient was placed with an Indian assistant surgeon, and it was over a month before the elephant returned to duty.

And now to digress for a tribute to this elephant. Most female elephants would either have knelt down with the pain of the wounds or fled away for miles, possibly throwing off her riders. This one stood firm and did nothing but what she was ordered to. Her staunchness probably saved the lives of her riders, nor did she resent the treatment in the hospital. She was ever ready in the future to take a *known* mahout and a *known* sportsman into danger, and always by her steadiness afforded the best chance to avoid it.

That evening the tracker requested an audience. "Sir," he said, "that tiger is not dead, for our own honour and for the safety of others he cannot be left." The sportsman replied, "That is so, but enough harm has been done, and I cannot take another elephant to fight an

unseen foe. Do you and your mate take rifles and, standing on the bluff above the grass, get the village buffaloes driven in so that either they will kill the tiger or he will be driven out and you can despatch him. The wounded elephant must remain here, and I am marching on to the next camp where you can follow."

On the third day the two trackers arrived, carrying a tiger skin. "Sir," they said, "we drove in the buffaloes, but the tiger would not move nor would the buffaloes attack him. But at least we knew the spot where he lay and we guessed that he could not move. We therefore entered the grass which was feet over our heads and made our way towards that spot till suddenly there was a roar and we fled, leaving behind us in our hurry both turban and shoes. Without these we were ashamed, so again we went into the grass and fortunately, seeing the tiger a few feet off, were able to kill him. The shot your honour fired at the last moment had broken the tiger's spine, so that he could barely drag himself along, otherwise we should have been killed."

The sportsman said: "You are not fit to be trusted with firearms. Have I not told you a hundred times that you are not to run risks

like this?" They said, "That is so, but now all is well."

After all these years I am still undecided who was bravest, the elephant or the trackers. The elephant overcame all her instinctive actions, she was defenceless, submissive to discipline and in a sudden and painful emergency still retained confidence in her riders who had hitherto protected her. All were grieved at their failure in this instance.

The trackers showed the coolest courage and repeated their attempt after being once repulsed; there was no necessity for their risk, they were acting against orders. With such men the sportsman was safe as could be in adverse circumstances, and they proved on other occasions that their lives were ready in defence of his.

Man, elephant, horse and dog have set examples, each as opportunity offered, to the so-called "ruling class," and personally I do not applaud that class above the others.

III

In the month of May in Upper India the life of the forester was one of constant anxiety. In front of the house was a rough table with the

points of the compass marked on it, and at any time of the twenty-four hours smoke by day or a glow by night was reported. Then the forester laid his map on the table and decided as accurately as was possible the locality of the conflagration. He sat as a spider in his web at the centre of some 400 square miles of inflammable forest, and his duty was to control any fire, and, if possible, to extinguish it wherever it may have broken out. A fierce westerly wind blew from dawn to dark ; coming out of the house it struck one as a blast from a furnace, for the air temperature was in the nineties and the sun temperature half as hot again. Out of the wind perspiration rolled down one's face, sometimes blinding in its insistence ; in the wind one's whole body was dry with the rapid evaporation. Between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. neither man nor beast moved from shelter unless obliged to by duty or the urge of self-protection.

The house stood on a bluff overlooking a broad valley, intersected with stony water-courses. Most of these were dry in the summer heats and were covered with patches of quickly growing grass, but the main bed of the river confined a rapid stream fordable at intervals.

In the evening the forester taking his salmon rod would go fishing, for he lived on game and fish, the orderly would stand near by with ready rifle in case of danger from tiger or wild elephant.

From the verandah of the house a wide view was spread, and in the early mornings and evenings the forest tribes could be seen returning from or proceeding to their grazing grounds or eager for water after twelve hours of drought, and the ways of elephant, deer and pig could be watched through field glasses and their habits studied. At night herds of elephants would spend hours bathing in the river, one could listen to the conversations which went on between mothers and their calves or to the roaring of a tiger urged by hunger, or to the grumbling growling as he passed replete to his daytime retreat.

The forester was alone so far as European companionship was concerned, his security depended on the good-will of his Indian staff and of the villagers who lived in the hills many miles away. In case of illness or accident his medical knowledge, though of the slightest, provided the only help available. At times when fever or cholera struck the isolated camp

it might be that only one or two were capable of helping the sick. It became evident that in man's mind the fear of death increases with the amount of preventive agencies there may be at hand, and when there are none, there is no anxiety in solitude or danger.

The forester had returned from his solitary ride of inspection round the neighbouring fire-watchers' posts. These men remained day and night in the forest, sometimes living in grass huts and at others building themselves sheltered perches in trees where they were secure from tiger or elephant. For tragedies had, and still did, occur, and there were instances of heroism when the watchers, who always went in couples, were assailed by the forest folk and made such resistance as men, unarmed save for a hatchet, might contrive.

A mahout stood in the shade of the verandah as the forest officer dismounted and handed over the horse to the waiting groom.

"The elephants went this morning to cut fodder where the grass was green," he said, "but a tiger prevented the work, and he refused to be driven away."

The forest officer, far from eager in the heat, nevertheless was obliged to take up this chal-



THE RIVER-BED

lenge and ordered two elephants to be got ready, the one, a half-grown female in training, the other an older female, but far from trustworthy. Just as the start was made the forest Ranger appeared and asked permission to ride on the small elephant. He was for a native an old man, of some sixty years, but still robust and agile after thirty years' forest service. The forest officer, guided by some intuition, refused the request, saying that to single-handed sportsmen there was always danger of some contretemps, and he had reason later to congratulate himself on this somewhat discourteous action and at the time the memory of a painful accident dimly recurred to his mind. What had happened was that a native landowner accompanying a party of tiger-shooters had his elephant charged by a wounded tiger. The elephant knelt down under the assault and the native was thrown off and fell on the tiger, who inflicted such wounds that he died a few hours later.

The forest officer's little party proceeded then to the spot indicated by the mahout, and at once aroused a tiger who was evidently suffering from the intense heat, for these animals are by nature denizens of cold climates,

and are more at home in northern Siberia than in the sultry forests of India; there indeed they have no endurance, and a run of even a few hundred yards across a sun-burnt plain results in such swelling of the pads of the feet that they are unable to proceed, and hence the refusal to leave shady cover when disturbed. This tiger walked in front of the elephant, giving no broadside shot until he reached the end of the patch of grass, there was a fallen tree on which he placed his forepaws and glared defiance at his pursuers.

The shot struck too far back to be immediately fatal and the tiger at once charged at the elephant. The forest officer could not fire, for his elephant was dancing about in the effort to escape from an unpleasant position. The small elephant turned and fled, the tiger following her, and all might yet have been well but that as the tiger struck at her hind legs, trying his hunting plan of ham-stringing a victim, the elephant turned and faced the tiger. In an instant, the tiger, standing on his hind legs, had buried his teeth in the base of the trunk while gripping both sides of the head with his forepaws.

Here was an ocular example of how tigers

pull down their largest prey, sometimes three times and more their own weight. The tiger pulled in jerks until the elephant knelt down and continued to jerk sideways until she lay helpless on her side. Her driver was shot off in front of the elephant over the tiger's head and lay stunned. The forest officer was powerless, afraid to fire in this jumble of tiger, man and elephant; the tiger stumbled away for some yards and lay in the grass, he was evidently feeling the effects of his wound badly.

The first consideration was to succour the man and next to secure the elephant which might flee to the forest and join a herd of wild elephants and so be permanently lost. Both man and elephant still lay on the ground apparently dazed by their fall, and had the tiger the strength to carry on the fight the result might be easily imagined. And so after some anxious moments both elephant and man sat up and took notice. The elephant showed a crimson face and trunk, the blood flowing to the ground along its length. The man querulously asked where his turban was, and was answered by a volley of abuse and inquiries as to whether he wanted to live or die. He clambered on to the forest officer's elephant,

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and was thence transferred to the wounded female and the procession started for camp.

There were four wounds on the elephant, two deep-seated marking the fangs, and a group of five claw-marks on each side of the head. Washed and disinfected and with a towel saturated with carbolic oil hanging over her face the elephant took her evening meal with zest, and in a fortnight she was fit for duty, but neither elephant nor man cared for tiger-hunting again, the man remarking that it was not worth while losing a turban like that! The tiger died not far from the scene of his last fight, and all the trouble was caused by the first shot being six inches too far back.



CHAPTER VIII

A Summer in the Himalayas

WE are standing on the watershed between two of the mightiest of Indian rivers on a grassy plain at the edge of a forest. The isolated deodars and silver firs, which are scattered over the steep declivities below, increase in number lower down the slopes and gradually merge into the dense forest which fills in the valley. There doubtless we should find sylvan monarchs, tall and straight, reared in the protected quietude of the lonely valley, but here we see nothing but evidence of the final struggle of the forest against nature. The short thick trunks are coated with lichen on the northern side, the twisted and gnarled boughs are festooned with banners of moss, now waving gently in the summer breezes but in the autumn hanging limp and dripping in the mist-laden air. The solitude is almost oppressive.

Towards the north the horizon is filled in

with mighty peaks between whose burnished sides flow glaciers, probably never visited by man, so unknown as to be nameless. Occasionally a faint sound like distant, very distant, thunder reaches our ears and a thin column of white smoke on a far-off slope shows the passing of an avalanche under the summer sun. Our thoughts go back to the lesser hills of Europe, and we realize that we are overlooking an extent of country larger than Switzerland, that we stand almost as high as the summit of Mont Blanc and that the avalanches we remark at intervals would, if they occurred in the smaller hills of western civilization, each be telegraphically described in a hundred morning papers. Involuntarily we look round for empty bottles, sandwich papers and initials cut in the bark of the grim trunks around us, and wake with joy to the fact that we are far from the haunt of the tripper and tourist.

Looking to one side of the watershed, over the meadows covered with flowers of every shape and hue, over the swarms of busy insects laying up store for the long winter, far down in the valley a small collection of huts is visible, standing on the banks of a stream in the midst of a few acres of terraced field and surrounded

by clumps of walnut and apricot trees. On the other side, also on the edge of a rivulet, stands another village conspicuous by its position in a clearing in the forest, looking like a few toy huts surrounded by toy trees of the sugar-cone type.

Distances are deceptive, but we know that these two streams are in reality raging torrents, that these two villages are the last inhabited spots you shall meet when, keeping north, you press towards the roof of the world and pass from tawdry officialism in India to the unexplored wildness of Central Asia ; and that, easy as it seems, even in the fair summer time you shall yet tramp many an hour before you can reach these lonely habitations where, should you escape being torn to pieces by the guardian dogs, you may be regaled with milk and honey and curious cakes which look, and alas also taste, like a mixture of raw dough and canary seed.

What a change has come over you in a few short weeks ! You have lost the pleasures of an Indian station ; the genial heat and glare of the dusty road with its avenue of dejected trees is no longer yours ; you are not now compelled for the sake of temporary distraction to make one of a party of unfortunates who crowd

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round the festive board, and eating without hunger never know but that the next mouthful may consummate the suffocation they already feel ; no longer do you join the gay throng of gyrating mortals absolutely melting in the effort to obtain amusement ; you are outside the reach of the harmless if unnecessary " peg," and, wonderful to relate, you feel all the better for it.

For here on the mountain heights you may roam all day occupied as your tastes shall dictate, and at night, rolled in your blankets, shall sleep and rest body and brain, waking to each morning with the zest of health and strength, ready to do and endure for pleasure's sake more than you would have thought possible to perform as a penance.

With your rifle in hand you may walk the " ringál " forests and track a heavier stag than ever lived in the sweltering plains from his wallow to his lair ; you may stalk the brown bear on the meadows in the evening light, or follow the wild ram to his inaccessible precipices ; you may meet the wily snow leopard or shoot the nimble musk deer ; you may study the habits of the glorious plumaged Himalayan birds ; you may interest yourself in plant life

or devote your leisure to the recording in monotone or colour of scenes which have touched you. You may interest yourself in the inhabitants of the country and over the ruddy blaze of the camp fire listen to stories of love and hate, of war and hunting, to quaint legends which cling round the unknown mountain world—that last refuge of sorcery and witchcraft.

Janghu was a young man of about twenty-five years old when his father, after a wild debauch on rice spirit, fell over a precipice and left his only son to inherit the ancestral property in one of the small villages above alluded to. He is standing before me now in his long woollen coat with cloth cap on his head and his bag containing flint, steel and knife at his girdle, on his feet grass sandals. His face is fair though grimy, and his grey eye has the mountaineering look of distance in it. He is a keen shikari and a good cragsman, and when in tracking wounded game you see Janghu take off his coat and sandals you know you are coming to a place a monkey would be careful in crossing.

But for all his everyday look Janghu has had experiences which have hurt his pride and embittered his life. At his father's death he

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ceased to be a slave, and found himself the possessor of a firmly built ch  let, a few acres of land, of a score of little brown cattle and of some Rs. 500 in cash and jewellery, but yet he was not happy. He wanted a woman in his house to free him from domestic drudgery and he wanted children to support him in his old age and inherit the wealth he dreamt of accumulating.

His thoughts turned to the other small village across the mountains which he had visited occasionally for traffic or on business, and his memory recalled a fair vision he had seen there before any thought of a speedy marriage had entered his dutifully filial brain. But now what in altered circumstances was to prevent him from plucking this prize? He knew, of course, that the girl was said to be promised to another, but he also knew that even if the promise were given a better offer would cancel it. Of love he understood nothing, he imagined that position was all powerful, and in full honesty of purpose he took his staff one spring morning and crossing the mountains announced his arrival at his proposed father-in-law's house the following day.

His business was settled after much haggling,

the father was content to bestow his daughter on Janghu for a cash payment of Rs. 200, all the more so as the connection with the neighbouring village was desirable ; and in the summer of the same year the bride was brought home with all primitive pomp and drunken revelry. No one save the lover she had left behind knew what vows had been exchanged and what course of action decided on. Janghu's wife took up her new position quietly and gave no occasion to the village gossips to tattle. She aided in the outdoor work with the cattle and with the harvest. No one noticed the despair in her dark eyes, or that the face once so rosy and smiling was now sad and sallow.

Her husband was proud and became fond of her, he decked her with the family jewels and even engaged a silversmith who, seated in the little village, hammered out rude ornaments from Government rupees for her adornment. She made a pretty picture standing there dressed in her grey and crimson blanket worn so gracefully as a skirt and hood, with the heavy necklace of rough turquoises, the golden earrings and silver bangles and anklets, her hair in one long plait and her blanket secured by gold brooches.

And so the months passed and the first fall of winter snow lay heavily over the land ; the river still crashed and roared through the deep gorges, now hung with ponderous icicles, and the mists rising from the seething waters hid the inky currents and added new horrors and dangers to the frail bridge, the only outlet from the village which spanned the narrow gorge, some sixty feet above the water level.

And one morning Janghu awoke, and calling his wife received no answer ; he searched the house and found her not, and then visiting the cattle-sheds and granaries he noticed footsteps in the soft snow. A man and a woman had left the village and crossed the bridge. It was enough. Awaking a friend, these two taking their guns and a supply of food for a few days set out on the trail which at first led towards the village whence the girl had been taken an unwilling bride.

The footmarks were easy to follow. The couple had at first proceeded with joyous haste, but evidently after some hours the effects of cold and fatigue had forced them to a gentler pace and then, as the short day dawned, and they had gained the heights, they had noticed the commotion in the village below, had learnt

that they were followed and probably for the first time realized that there was no safety in their home and that it was impossible either to return or to proceed.

What they intended to do in their extremity no one can tell. Had it been summer they might, hiding in the woods, feeding on the wild fruits and roots, have reached with toil and suffering some other country, but in the winter in this vast expanse of snow, without food, without warmth, each step a danger to life, what was left them? In childish despair they turn their faces to the relentless mountains of the north and plod over the deep snow, two helpless human beings, the forces of nature against them on the one side, on the other the revenge of savage men.

Their pursuers smiled grimly as the trail turned towards the boundless snow fields, they recruited themselves with food and stayed their fatigue with tobacco and then pressed on after the faltering fugitives.

The end was very near. Sheltered by a sturdy rock against the freezing blast these two sat looking at each other in despair. The girl implored her lover to escape and leave her, she would not be injured, her value as a slave

was too great ; but he, moved by affection, and knowing that he must ever be, for fear of his life, an outcaste from his village, remained till approaching footsteps roused him into action. Unarmed but with the strength of despair he flung himself on the man who had robbed him of his bride, and the next instant fell with a bullet through his breast from the gun of his other pursuer.

The girl rose and went silently with her husband, leaving the dead body of her lover as he lay in the trampled and bloody snow. Janghu too walked in silence on the return track, his heart too sore for words of rage or abuse, all his thoughts on the wreck of his happiness and his ruined home. The party arrived at the river towards sunset and were surrounded by a noisy crowd clamouring for news and full of abuse for Janghu's wife, but he remained silent and motioning to her to proceed him set foot on the frail bridge.

But the tragedy was not yet complete. With the same inflexible purpose which appears to have actuated this woman all through her short life, in reaching the centre of the bridge she without a word or a cry flung herself from the footway and instantly disappeared in the

wreaths of mist that floated above the pent-up torrent.

Janghu returned to his lonely home with his honour avenged but with a broken heart. He spent days and weeks searching along the river banks for some vestige of the form he had learnt to love, knowing the while full well that the corpse of his wife must have been ground to powder within half a mile of the scene of her suicide. He still shudders when passing that bridge, and resting by the side of the river in some of our many excursions he grows silent as the river thunder proclaims the passing of a mighty boulder rolled over and over by the irresistible force of the glacier-fed torrent.

Silence falls on the little circle at the completion of this narrative, the incidents have still the charm and excitement of novelty to the listeners having only recently occurred, and with a few more remarks we separate to indulge in dreamless if noisy slumber.

The summer passes all too rapidly, and pressing forward to higher elevations as the heat increases we find ourselves in July in a country where the place of the big rivers is taken by insignificant streams fed from innumerable ice fields and possessing a flow and ebb governed

not indeed by the moon but by the action of the sun on the melting glaciers ; the domestic cow too has been supplanted by the more useful yak, and the sight of wheat fields in ear at this season shows that we are no longer in a tropical or even temperate climate. We are, in fact, approaching the undulating grassy plateau on the farther side of the Himalaya, and here we spend many days with always something new to interest and some new sensation to record until we are warned by the ever-increasing mist that the monsoon has burst in Hindustan and that it will be wiser and more comfortable to return to lower elevations. The decision is not taken too early as before, on more than one occasion, we have been kept waiting for hours at an elevation of over 17,000 feet for the mists to roll by and enable us to retire from a position where a false step meant death and exposure to the night cold little less.

We are accompanied by a sturdy mountaineer with rugged face who remains silent unless addressed, and it was not until close companionship in the mountains gave him confidence, that he could be brought to speak about himself. And then, little as it was expected, his tale hinged too on love and

jealousy, on hate and revenge; but that such passions could be aroused by ladies who dressed similarly to their admirers, who wore their coats, pantaloons and felt boots till they dropped off, the determination of whose sex as we sat in front of their encampment was always a puzzle, seemed passing strange to one accustomed at least to the pretence of Western civilization!

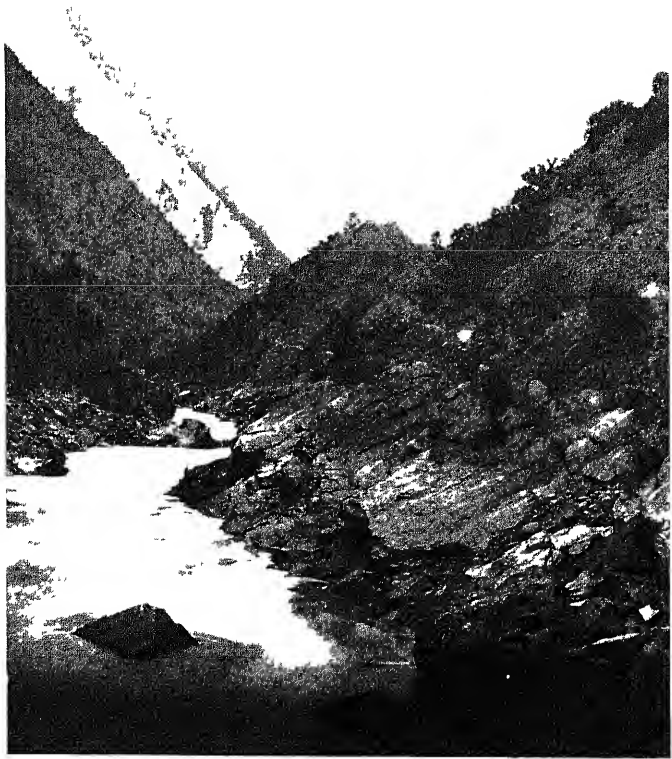
The story was an old one. Chinese officials arriving for the collection of tribute in all the swagger of fine clothing and leopard-skin mantles seemed demigods to the Tartar village maidens and the flirtation that followed was not to the taste of our companion. To give him his due he was no secret assassin; so far as we knew he feared neither God nor man, but he and his brethren decided that they could not brook the interference of the aristocratic strangers, and told them so with more warmth than elegance. The visitors were warned to remove camp at once, but treated in their miserable ignorance the warning with contempt.

Their two small tents were still standing next day when the offended tribesmen walked stolidly from their village to take their revenge. The three gorgeous officials were within, jest-

ing and laughing, when one, two and a third bullet whistled through the frail structure. To remain was death, and sword in hand they burst from their shelter. The first fell dead at the tent door ; but the shooting was wild, and the others fled for their lives, the one to the river, the other to the mountain.

The now blood-thirsty Tartars followed on the trail of the former, and seeing him disappear in the water proceeded down stream to riddle his body as it passed ; but in this they were disappointed, and after waiting for some time recommenced their search up stream. The poor wretch with only his mouth out of water could not see, but must have heard approaching footsteps, must have suffered agonies of fear lest he should be detected, and have congratulated himself heartily as each of his enemies passed without remark ; but he was a doomed man, for raising himself out of the icy torrent ere his pursuers had relinquished the search he was instantly detected and shot. The third official escaped to the mountains, and though ardently pursued got clear away.

Our companion did not appear to regret his share in this proceeding nor did he anticipate much trouble in store for him. He merely



THE PENT-UP FORRENT

remarked that no doubt in the following summer the village would be fined for their misconduct, but he did not foresee any more vigorous punishment.

Leaving then this village of ready justice we retraced our steps to milder climes and camped close by the village of our old friend Janghu. And here a strange thing befell us, for in a climate where the average rainfall was seven inches, behold the sky was overcast and the rain fell in torrents so that in a few hours the annual fall had been exceeded ; the following day we were treated to sleet and the third to snow so that our little tent became one frozen mass both inside and out. Food we had none, save a few miserable stores, for no fire could be lit ; rest we had little, for we could not put off our boots and mackintosh, and, moreover, we were expecting instant death as the landslips and avalanches thundered all round us. The villagers wept and sacrificed goats, we suffered in silence and hunger.

On the morning of the fourth day we were aroused by a most portentous rumbling, and rushed to the open. The formerly clear torrent was now a boiling flood of muddy water, the summer landscape was white with snow, and

from the summit of the opposite hill an enormous mass of rock had become detached and was bounding down the steep slopes. The track seemed to lay directly over a few fields and houses, and we stood spellbound as we saw the wretched owners of these huts rush from their homes and stare wildly up in the endeavour to ascertain in which direction safety lay. But the forest shut off everything from their view.

In ever lengthening bounds the rocks came flying onwards, and, missing the buildings, plunged with a final fall of hundreds of feet into the river-bed. For an instant the water was dammed up, but surmounting the obstacle resumed its irresistible course. And with this final exhibition of power the elements appeared exhausted, the clouds rolled away, the sun shone out once more, and the only evidence of the troublous times remained in the swollen river and the hillsides seamed with torrents and landslips.

We, however, left the village and once more retreated to lower regions where we remained till the monsoon mists had passed away, till the clear October sky showed its brilliancy, and man and animal were preparing for the enjoy-

ment of one short month before the stern winter should level the earth with its snow-drifts. Then once more to the north !

The glacier streams now ran shallow, clear and blue, the wild sheep gambolled on the turfy slopes and the waddling bear indulged in days of luxurious feeding to aid him in the struggle with the winter's cold ; whilst we, sharing in the joyousness of nature, pitched our camp at the foot of a mighty glacier, and though we had not spoken our mother tongue for five months felt happy and contented.

That glacier was a glorious sight for ever to be remembered ; whether you saw it at sunrise saddened with tints of pearly grey and indigo blue ; or at midday when the bright sun converted its thousand pinnacles into columns of fire ; or at sunset when it glowed with delicate rose and golden hues , or under the light of the moon when it seemed solemn and deathly ; for every occasion it had a beauty of its own and each aspect was more perfect than the last. Speak of elevation ! It ceased to be a glacier at an elevation of 15,000 feet, and spread its arms on all sides towards the peaks which towered seven and eight thousand feet above it. Speak of size ! It stretched for miles on

either side, an endless succession of billows of ice, and disappeared in the dim distance seemingly undiminished in breadth. And along its sides were meadows of turfy grass running up to the foot of huge precipices on whose ledges and crevices rested the everlasting snow.

We thought then that all the beasts of the valley had come with us to enjoy this lovely country. The hills were full of wild sheep, of pheasants, grouse and snow partridges. Bears roamed confidently on the gentler slopes, but all seemed bewitched for we could not bring them to bag.

In this extremity one of our companions mysteriously asserted that he had the gift of second sight, and would that night bring the powers of witchcraft to bear on our difficulties. Incited by a big glass of spirits the wizard, stripped of most of his clothing, steps into the circle before the camp fire and commences a monotonous dance accompanied by an equally monotonous chant; but after a time as the spirits of witchcraft, or of rum, work on his brain he begins slowly to revolve, increasing his speed minute by minute till he falls to the ground writhing and foaming at the mouth.

The sight is sufficiently disgusting, but the

time has now arrived to seek for a knowledge of the future. "Do you see any wild rams?" he is asked, and replies in the affirmative. To the question of how many he slowly counts up to fourteen. The locality is difficult to ascertain, but is at last arrived at, and finally comes the important question of how many we shall bag. He seems pained at this question, but finally replies that no shot is fired, they all run away! The professor of witchcraft is removed and put to bed, whence he issues next morning with wild red eyes again equally ascribable to sorcery or alcohol. We, however, proceed early to the defined locality and see fourteen rams which run away as if possessed, seeking safety in inaccessible cliffs; and return to camp pondering on these things and well aware of the looks of triumph with which we are regarded.

At the end of the month signs of snow and winter force us to retrace our steps to civilization where we arrive bronzed and healthy with an indifference to social enjoyments, extraordinary to the uninitiated, but understood by those who have lived with nature for a time, and require a period of custom to overcome the feeling that the small duties and amenities of society are petty and harassing.

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We left the plains when the spring was coming with its dust, hot winds and discomforts; we return to them, better in every way, to enjoy the glorious tropical winter and possessing a treasure of reminiscences stored up to refresh us in long after years—the memories of a summer in the Himalaya.



CHAPTER IX

Man-eating Tigers

THE death of a man-eating tiger lately recorded in the *Pioneer* recalls various incidents in the career of a young tigress, who in the space of nine months killed some dozens of human beings, depopulated several villages and stopped work over the greater part of a Forest Division, in spite of the most strenuous efforts made to destroy her, efforts increased by the incentive of Rs. 500 reward offered for her head.

She began her dismal career in July by killing two women near a forest village, and by the end of the following December had done at least thirty persons to death, becoming bolder and more cunning with each murder committed. Her beat lay in the foothills of the Himalaya, and she roamed over an area some twenty-five miles long by three or four broad. The country was such that she could neither be tracked for any distance, nor driven by elephants or

beaters ; she would not kill a tied buffalo nor would she come back to a corpse if once disturbed. She never remained long in any locality, so that while futile arrangements to circumvent her were being made in one place, news would be brought that she had found a new victim fifteen miles away. She became at last so bold that she would, in open daylight, carry off men and women when cutting the crops in the terraced fields, stalking the unfortunates from above and suddenly springing on them.

It was on one of these occasions that she was the means of discovering a heroine in the person of an old woman who, seeing her husband seized, rushed at the tigress with her sickle and drove her off. I saw the husband shortly afterwards, he had five claw marks on his chest and three deep indentations in his head, but seemed little the worse for his adventure.

The terror of this animal's ferocity had now spread through the country ; the villagers left their homes for safer regions, and no wonder, for being on demarcation work in that locality I found on one occasion a village seemingly deserted but in reality in a state of siege, the inhabitants being afraid to draw water from a

stream 100 yards off their houses. Their gratitude was great when I stood sentinel whilst they filled their vessels !

Imagine the despair which must seize on an unarmed, defenceless company of women returning from work to their village when they see the dread tigress following at a distance, and know that one or more of their number must never again reach the safety of home. Is it surprising when this had occurred more than once that the wretched tenantry preferred to leave, at least for a time, their ancestral lands, hard as the wrench must have been.

Work was now commencing in the forests, bamboo cutting was in full swing, affording an easy chance for more murders. In a very short time the tigress learned to stalk the sound of an axe, and made many victims before the forest was proved to be even more dangerous than the fields had been. The method of attack adopted was so sudden as to prevent any possibility of escape, the blow dealt so deadly as to render even a cry for help impossible. The victim was dead and carried off before his companions knew what had occurred.

The state of affairs was becoming most depressing, it was necessary to be on the *qui*

vive day and night ; one's heart filled at one time with pity when a wretched man was killed within 200 yards of one's tent or at another with rage when the brute came roaring round the camp at night, scaring man and beast equally.

All this time, as I said before, the most strenuous efforts were made for her destruction ; poison, spring guns and deadfalls were ineffectually resorted to, any number of buffaloes were tied out at night. And many a time was the fresh trail of a kill taken up in hopes of obtaining a shot at the tigress, but with no further result than that of recovering a mangled or half-eaten corpse. During January and February this tigress had disposed of fifteen to twenty more persons, and it was in the beginning of March, when I had just received news of another kill, that a sergeant and twelve men of a Gurkha regiment reported their arrival for orders. They had been sent from a neighbouring station on my requisition to see what force could do to remove this horrible animal, cunning having been found of no avail.

I must say that I had little hope of success attending this new attempt, but receiving information of the locality of the last tragedy

the men started off at once for the village and reached it the same evening. There, gladly received by the terrified villagers who recounted their tale of woe and eagerly promised assistance on the morrow, they gained every information about the tigress and formed their plan of attack.

Early next morning, starting with their trembling guides, they were shown the spot where the last victim had been seized, and forming into line advanced cautiously and silently on the trail. Fortune was all in their favour. The man-eater had remained undisturbed on her kill and was apparently unalarmed by the approach of the silent hunters ; she may have mistaken them for the browsing herd of village cattle to which she was accustomed, she could not imagine that they were men, the yelling crowd of villagers wont to turn out after each of her murders. She leapt on to a rock to investigate this novelty and found a dozen levelled rifle barrels glinting in the morning sun. With a growl of rage and fear she turned to go, but fell riddled with bullets, whilst a cheer of triumph was the last sound which greeted her ears.

The remains of the last victim were found

inside her. The tigress was a young animal in perfect condition. The pad of her left fore-foot had at one time been deeply cut from side to side but had thoroughly healed, leaving, however, a deep scar which proved her presence wherever she roamed. Since the death of this animal I have known of several man-eaters, if not so destructive because they did not confine their operations exclusively to human beings, yet much bolder.

One incident, almost sickening in its ghastly details, occurred not very long ago. Two cow-herds living in a small grass hut in a somewhat wild forest were cooking their food in the evening when a tiger suddenly sprang on one and carried him off. His companion intimidated the tiger with shouts and threats and succeeded in making him leave his victim. Carrying his wounded companion into the hut the man closed the entrance and waited for daylight. But this he never saw, for after a time the tiger, emboldened by the increasing darkness, returned and forcing his way into the hut carried off the uninjured man who was doubtless doing all he knew to prevent the tiger's approach. The other who was first seized died of his wounds and of terror the next

day, after relating the story to those who ^{had} ~~had~~ found him.

To conclude, it is well that there is sometimes a grim humour to relieve the depressing influence of a man-eater's career. Writing on one occasion to a Colonel of a native regiment for a party of staunch men to aid in killing a man-eater who had become intolerably bold, I was astounded by receiving the following reply :

“ MY DEAR O. C.,—

“ It seems rather an unsportsmanlike thing to send my men down to shoot the tiger. If you will show me where he is I will come down and shoot him myself.

“ Yrs., etc.”

To which I replied :

“ MY DEAR COLONEL,—

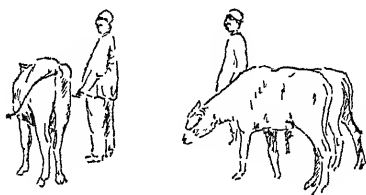
“ If I knew where the tiger was small chance would you have of getting a shot.

“ Yrs., etc.”

The men were sent ; they divided into small parties of three or four men and were therefore utterly useless. One party sat up over a kill and returned asserting that they had killed the tiger, but as they would not bring in the body

the Rs. 400 reward did not fall to their lot. The tiger continued to kill after their departure but suddenly disappeared leaving no trace.

Of the many man-eaters I have known none have been aged or decrepid animals driven to feed on human beings because they could not obtain other food. They lived in a country full of game and where cattle were plentiful ; but they had lost their fear of man, and trusting in their superior strength and cunning had no difficulty in satisfying their hunger. At the same time they seemed to recognize that an armed man was dangerous, and they must be doubly on their guard to avoid falling into a trap. It is this apparent knowledge of man and his habits, amounting in some instances almost to reason, that renders a man-eating tiger so terrible.



CHAPTER X

An Adventure with a Tiger

THE following story was related to me by the chief actor in the occurrence, and is a realistic description of an adventure which has evidently made a lasting impression on him.

It was, and probably still is, the custom in India to protect the State Forests from the fires which rage during the summer months by burning in the early spring, the grass lands outside the tree jungle, and thus on extensive areas a crop of green grass springs up on which the various kinds of deer greedily graze. This fact is taken advantage of by the sportsman, who in the early morning or late evening saunters cautiously along the edge of the forest in the hope of getting a shot at spotted deer, sambhar, or other species of deer with which the State Forests abound, thus combining amusement with the exercise so necessary to prevent enervation in a tropical climate.

It was my custom, when enjoying this form

of sport, to carry a single 303 rifle, on account of its accuracy and ranging powers, whilst the native orderly who accompanied me was armed with a double-barrelled express rifle in case of meeting dangerous game. It was his duty to remain one pace in my rear, and to hand me the loaded rifle immediately it was required.

Owing to the absence of leave of both of my trained men, it was on one occasion my misfortune to be compelled to put up with the services of an inexperienced man who had probably never before been on foot in the forests ; but relying on the usual courage of the native when not in a responsible position, and on the rarity with which dangerous animals were encountered and the ease of avoiding them if not molested, I thought little beyond inconvenience would follow the temporary absence of my trained hunters. Starting off therefore one morning as usual before sunrise, we had walked several miles without seeing any game worthy of pursuit. I myself was no inexperienced sportsman. I was acquainted with the numerous habits of the numerous species of wild animals that I might encounter. I had already killed many tigers and knew that they were not aggressive if undisturbed ; indeed I

looked upon the bear and the wild boar as two of the animals to be approached with the greatest caution, for it depended entirely upon their temper at the time of meeting, whether or not they would take the offensive.

As we passed through a narrow neck of forest land dividing two grassy plains, we heard, some distance in advance, the alarm cry of spotted deer and hastened our steps to get a view both of the stags and of the intruder on their solitude. Arrived at the edge of the forest, the former were easily visible, one stag and several hinds were standing at a distance of some three hundred yards, looking in our direction and occasionally uttering the short bark indicating their uneasiness.

We had almost concluded that we were the object of their fear, and had commenced to regret that clumsy stalking should so readily have betrayed our presence, when at about one hundred yards from the deer, and therefore double that distance from us, a large tiger arose from where he had been in ambush, and recognizing, no doubt, that further concealment was useless, stood looking at the prey he coveted.

I instantly reflected that, as the tiger stood broadside towards me, and as it is an invariable

rule that these animals when wounded by an unseen hand run in the direction they are facing, I had a fair opportunity of inflicting a mortal wound without incurring inordinate risk, and taking careful aim I fired with the single rifle. The tiny bullet struck the tiger in the body, and he responded to the shock by leaping into the air with a sidelong movement; then recovering his footing he started at a brisk canter straight in our direction, uttering fierce growls the while.

I considered that the brute had not yet seen us, that the direction he took was the result of pure accident; and that, at the pace he was coming, it would be easy to kill or turn him aside when within more convenient distance. Such thoughts do not occupy an appreciable moment of time; indeed there is not much leisure to be enjoyed whilst a tiger covers two hundred yards at a fair pace.

I put my hand behind me to receive the spare rifle; an involuntary movement, which up till now had always met with a response; but on this occasion I felt no welcome pressure of the steel barrels, and looking round I saw that my orderly had left my side and was running through the standing grass in the tree

forest. I became also aware that the tiger had been attracted by the rustling in the grass and was coming at increased speed in our direction ; and it flashed on me that unless I could overtake my attendant and possess myself of the rifle he carried it would go hard with me, and probably with him.

I set out therefore with all the speed I could command in the footsteps of my orderly, crashing through dry grass some three feet high and falling over roots and branches ; it was a frenzied race, and I had nearly succeeded in arresting my man, who probably thought that I was the tiger and that his last moment had arrived, when he fell heavily against the trunk of a fallen tree, that the rank growth of the grass concealed from our view ; I followed suit, and in an instant we found ourselves lying in the grass, breathless and bruised, but with the log between us and the advancing tiger.

I heard the brute enter the grass and come lumbering blindly along on our trail, and lost no time in turning to my orderly and demanding my rifle. A look at him was sufficient ; he turned up his empty hands and shook his head feebly ; the leaden colour of his visage proclaimed the fact that he was suffering from

nervous collapse, and that he had thrown away my rifle as a useless encumbrance in his wild flight.

As I hastily crammed a cartridge into my single rifle, the tiger had arrived at the log, and I was praying that he might clear it and us at one bound and continue his wild career ; but the brute showed no greater foresight than we had ; he crashed heavily against the log and subsided with a savage growl ; his wound was apparently more urgent than his lust for revenge, but I cannot pretend that I enjoyed the position, indeed I may confess that I was extremely uneasy, but a glance at my orderly braced my nerves. I felt that it was impossible that two men should arrive at this pitiable condition at one and the same time, and thus whilst on one side of the log the tiger lay, and growling licked his wound, or shaking his heavy head, flung drops of gore and foam around, I had time to reflect how easily I might have prevented this predicament had I held the heavy rifle, either in the open or even when we reached the log ; and also how poor the chance now was of killing, with the one shot at my disposal, this enraged beast, before he could do us mortal injury.

It soon, however, became evident that some action must be taken to terminate this intolerable suspense. It was unlikely that the tiger would quit his resting-place unless disturbed, and it appeared impossible for us to retire without attracting the brute's attention to our presence ; on the other hand, the heavy breathing of my useless companion would sooner or later be heard, whilst I felt that in all probability my nerves would not much longer resist the strain imposed on them.

I determined, therefore, to ascertain as surely as possible the direction in which the tiger lay, and then endeavour to advance on him noiselessly from the rear, and end the scene by a final shot through the brain. This appeared to be our only chance ; though at this distance of time, and even at the moment, I realized that it was but a poor one.

I put my plan into operation at once, and commenced crawling towards that end of the log which I had selected. It seemed that hours passed, as I advanced inch by inch, putting aside each blade of grass that impeded my journey of a few feet, but which seemed like leagues. Gradually I arrived at the end of my toilsome progress ; and then, raising myself

from my recumbent position, I peered cautiously around. But luck was dead against me, for at a distance of but a few feet I observed the head and not the tail of the tiger. I had misjudged his position, and now, though he had not yet clearly seen me, there was no doubt that he had heard my stealthy movements. With ears laid back, glowing eyes, and lips dripping with blood and moisture, he was regarding fixedly in my direction ; his laboured breath came in heavy growls, and it was merely a question of seconds before he would spring towards me.

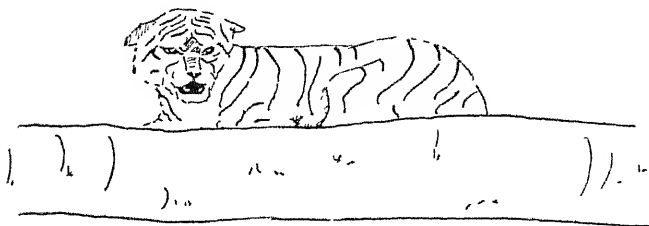
I remained motionless, repressing an almost irresistible inclination to leap to my feet, and end this horrible adventure in any way, when I noticed that my orderly was glaring round with a new air of horror depicted on his face. He had evidently missed me, and hearing the renewed growls of the tiger, had come to the conclusion that he had been deserted and was about to be sacrificed. With a sudden exclamation, he rose to his feet and commenced running through the grass away from our hiding place ; and at the same instant the tiger, uttering a savage roar, cleared the log at one bound and started in pursuit.

The denouement had come at last, and in no pleasant form. Though filled with fury at the imbecility of my companion, the instinctive necessity of aiding him to escape was stronger than the desire of ensuring my own safety by permitting matters to take their course. Had there been a third person in the difficulty in which we found ourselves, I should most certainly, in order to save two lives, have permitted the sacrifice of the individual who had brought this trouble on us. I rose therefore to my feet, and taking such aim as was possible at the tiger as he bounded over the grass, pressed the trigger.

There was a heavy fall, followed by a slight rustling in the grass. Reloading and mounting the log, I could, even from that elevation, see nothing of the tiger or my orderly, and was therefore compelled to advance, much against my inclination, to investigate. I arrived on the scene, foot by foot, cautiously advancing through the grass, and had the satisfaction of finding the tiger dead, the bullet having pierced his spine at the nape of the neck; the man lay a pace in advance, on his face, he was uninjured save by anticipation, so propping him against the log, after explaining to him the

actual state of affairs, I left him to await the arrival of a cart which I sent to remove the tiger.

It is needless to say that I desired this orderly to resign his post and return to the more tranquil occupation to which his village life had suited him ; but it would be unjust if I did not hasten to add that during all my experience I have never had but this one case of timidity on the part of my native companions. As a rule they are steadfast in danger and more to be blamed for fool-hardiness than for lack of courage. The one instance in which they have failed me, and its nearly fatal consequences, made therefore the deepest impression on me.



CHAPTER XI

The Other Side of the Question

IT is an evening in the month of May, a hot May and a hot evening. I am perched some fifteen feet from the ground in a "Machan" where I have been sitting motionless for nearly two hours. My whole body is cramped and uncomfortable, the flies which worried me nearly to distraction before sunset are now quiescent, but their place is taken by thousands of mosquitoes which alight on every available square inch of skin and, when there is no longer standing room, buzz round my head in hungry swarms. The outlook is picturesque. To my right, a forest lake covered in its shallower portions with the huge lotus blossom in full bloom, freckled with islets of flowering narkal grass, bordered by green rushes and reeds, interspersed with patches of open water in which snake birds and moorhens are disporting themselves. On the dead cotton tree by the side of the lake a couple of ospreys are

perched, and occasionally utter their discordant cry. Herons arise with outstretched neck and, composing themselves for flight, curve back their heads with harsh croaks. As a background, the sál forest, gorgeous in the new foliage of spring and resplendent with white heavy flower.

To my left, a patch of tree jungle, an indescribable mixture of foliage, here and there a thick undergrowth of jáman, an occasional stretch of greensward which would be no disgrace to a country house in England, a siris tree covering the ground with its scented pods, a rohini with the departing glory of its crimson berries. And within fifteen yards of my perch a dead buffalo, his hindquarters gone, a busy swarm of insects around him and two circumspect vultures in the tree above. The sun has set, all the beauty has gone from the scene, leaving only the disagreeables. The herd of spotted deer which have afforded pleasant remark for the last half-hour have vanished, the stillness of the summer night is interrupted only by the distant call of a sambhar, which is taken promptly as an excuse for crowing by all the neighbouring peacocks ; the busy night-jar is noiselessly flitting around and, settling,

utters his curious note so like a tapping on a plank ; the crested fish-owl is heard scolding and hooting on the shadowy trees by the water's edge.

And suddenly attention is directed to a heavy footstep through the fallen leaves advancing unhesitatingly and without concealment. It ceases as suddenly as it commenced, and every faculty is strained to distinguish, in the fast-falling gloom, the cause of the footsteps and to interpret the reason of the sudden silence. This silence, however, did not last for long. It was succeeded by a rush and a stifled roar and then, horrible to relate, a voice broke the stillness of the night. It was gruff and angry and uttered these words: "What the —— are you doing? Leave a fellow alone, can't you?" And another voice, powerful but gentle, answered, "My son, I save you from destruction, listen to words of wisdom and then proceed on your way."

I turned quietly in the "Machan." Two tigers were dimly visible in the gloom of the starry night. The elder and larger, an immense brute who showed signs of age, was restraining a younger but full-grown animal. I repressed my desire to fire and listened to the conversation which ensued,

"Yes," replied the youth, "this is all very well, but when there is a buffalo in the question, and *my* buffalo too, I would rather have my dinner first and then, safe from interference of yours, listen to the words of wisdom you promise!"

"My son," enjoined the elder, "if buffalo was my object, I might have secured it long before you arrived on the scene. I lay and watched it at a distance, I heard your approach, saw the dexterous way in which you dispatched it, and after you had taken your fill, might have made a meal myself were I not at that moment the living sepulchre of a sambhar stag and therefore uninfluenced by the coarse and skinny prey you had made. I appeal to you, whether or not I might, on your arrival here this evening, have despatched you with a single blow had I wished to play back on you in any way?"

The younger grunted deeply, and after a pause ungraciously replied that he was in no hurry for his feed as he had only twelve hours before engulfed half the kill which was the subject of his jealousy. "In that case," replied the senior, "listen to the story of my life and then fall to with what appetite you may."

"I may," he began, "claim to be a naturalized British subject, for though my parents

were Nepalese, I was born under the munificent government which offers a reward of Rs. 10 for my head. Fortunately, the value of the rupee is now infinitesimal and still decreasing, so that this premium is, like most other matters concerning this coin, merely swagger which does not affect me.

“My parents left the country of their birth on account of the unsportsmanlike behaviour of its inhabitants. You would hardly believe unless I told you”—and here he growled the pronoun—“that these wretches have a custom of tracking tigers and surrounding them with one to two hundred elephants. Gradually constricting the circle, they detach shooters, from whom there is absolutely no chance of escape, except to such tigers as are capable of reasoning and keeping their tempers. My parents awoke one morning to find themselves in the toils, but my noble, if somewhat unsympathetic father made no further remark except to order my mother, under pain of his displeasure, to do exactly as he did. My mother, a rather vain and timid creature, promptly agreed, for she had too often observed that my father’s displeasure resulted in severe injury or death to those who incurred it. When,

therefore, the ring was complete and the shooters advanced to bag their prey, my parents arose as one man, and, uttering the most frightful roars, charged the circle at the weakest point and got clear away, after inflicting various wounds in the legs of the surrounding elephants. They did not halt in their wild career till they crossed the river boundary of their native country and lay panting in a jáman grove in British India. And they then and there decided that their native country was not good enough, and that they preferred to pass the rest of their days in a locality where it was utterly impossible to collect 200 or even 50 elephants.

“ Thus it happened that I was born in British India, and here, I must remark, that it is a poor country, for in the first place they protect the forests from fire, so that it is almost impossible to catch a deer, unless you have the speed of a greyhound and can course him in the open, and secondly because the jungles are full of forest officers, who, if they do not themselves shoot, invite others to do it for them, and to this end train up their servants to notice each foot-mark inadvertently left on a sandy path. Still, with these evils ever present, at least you are not surrounded and obliged to fight for your

life. A little caution and an escape by flight is always open to you.

“The three happiest years of my life were spent with my doting parents. I had, during that time, absolutely no cares, food was plentiful and danger did not exist, when two experienced tigers were for ever on the look-out. But one unlucky day I incurred my father’s displeasure. I inadvertently annexed a bone which he had put aside as a toothpick after a full meal on a spotted stag, and he struck me a blow on the head which was instantly followed by oblivion. When I awoke, I was alone, and soon became aware that I had been left to my own resources. This, however, did not discourage me, for I was well able to provide for myself, and after an exhaustive survey of the vicinity, I fixed my head-quarters in the neighbourhood of a forest bungalow, whence should venison fail me, I could always make a raid on the cattle which grazed around.

“It was on such an occasion that, late in the afternoon, I had struck down and dragged to cover a large buffalo, but unfortunately the noise of the inevitable scuffle at once attracted the attention of the owner, who, rushing off to the Forest House, gave news to the Europeans

there. In a very short time three or four men arrived and surveyed my prize, and though I prevented them by incessantly growling from removing the buffalo, they nevertheless insisted in climbing a neighbouring tree, where they remained for some time for some inexplicable reason. Towards nightfall, however, they came down from their perch and walked hurriedly away, whilst faint with hunger, I advanced to the kill, determined to make a hearty meal. No sooner had I reached the carcase when I felt a blow in my side, which threw me off my balance and in the same instant a loud explosion rent the air. I lay groaning with rage and pain, filled with an indescribable longing to tear something to pieces, and waited till some sound should disclose my enemy. It seemed ages before I heard a slight noise in that fatal tree and a voice softly whispered, 'He is now dead, let us get out of *this*!' a remark which was instantly followed by a loud shout and the approaching footsteps of an elephant. The whole treachery of man was now apparent to me, and I recognized that I had been, perhaps, mortally wounded by some miserable wretches who, seated far out of reach, had shot me as soon as I approached the kill.

“ In the confusion and bustle which followed the arrival of the elephant, I staggered a short distance away and congratulated myself when I saw the sportsmen depart promising to bring in my corpse in the morning. At that time, however, I was miles away. First dragging my aching body to the nearest pool I cooled my wound and stopped the bleeding by rolling on its clayey banks and then, leaving no bloody trail, I slowly reached the gloomy recesses of the great tree jungle and rested, determined to sell my life dearly if further pursued. For weeks I hung between life and death, reduced to a skeleton by the pain of my wound and the constant pangs of hunger. I roamed, the ghost of my former self, through my old haunts, forced to exist on all kinds of food I once despised, since I had no strength to kill deer or cattle. It was not till the following winter that I took a turn for the better and became myself once more, but changed from a careless frolicking young tiger to a circumspect and experienced animal who knew that length of life depended on self-restraint and caution.”

The narrator here paused and the younger tiger gave vent to a sigh of impatience. “ Perhaps,” he said to his companion, “ when you

have got your breath again, you will tell me why this wearisome tale is inflicted on me ? ”

The other appeared somewhat vexed at the discourteous speech but quietly answered, “ Because, my friend, there is a human being armed with several guns in that jáman tree just over your buffalo, and though I am screened from his fire by this tree trunk, you are full in view.” The younger tiger with one frantic bound sheltered himself behind his cynical friend, and after a while breathlessly exclaimed, “ I don’t believe a word of it, I can see nothing.” With a low chuckle the other gave answer, “ Had you not believed what I said, why show such agility in changing your position, and if you still disbelieve, why not walk up and see how your buffalo is getting on.”

The junior made no reply and the old tiger went on. “ I have lived to a good old age and know every device that can be brought against me by man, and yet I also know that some day I shall fall a victim to my own carelessness or neglect ; it was to save your life I have spent the best part of a hot evening here, not because I admire you or your temper, but because we shall soon disappear as a race unless young fools will learn to profit by the experience of their

elders. The story of my life you will not let me complete, but I have a few more remarks to make and they shall be to the point. Always keep near your kill ; if it is visited by man, desert it at once and for ever. Never wait for the near approach of an elephant ; however unpleasant it may be, always retire as soon as you hear one in the vicinity. Do not annoy human beings, you will be classified as a dangerous pest and your destruction is certain. Finally, cultivate a more courteous disposition and take well-meant advice in the spirit it is offered."

With that he arose and instantly disappeared in the neighbouring grass. The younger tiger muttering something about "old fool" and "dotage" slunk cautiously away and was lost to sight amongst the gloomy trees.

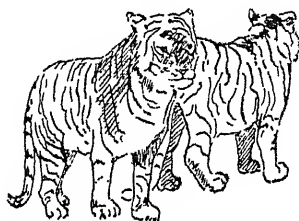
Meanwhile I, the occupant of the "Machan," entranced at this marvellous occurrence and thankful that I was safe up a tree, composed myself to pass the few remaining hours of darkness. I awoke when the earliest dawn was faintly visible over the distant forest and my first glance was for the buffalo. It was gone ! This then, said I to myself, is the result of sleeping at your post and dreaming idle dreams

when you should have been on the watch. I looked cautiously around, and, guided by a sound suggestive of bone crushing, made out dimly, in the feeble light, a group at about forty yards' distance. It was indistinct and blurred, but the fast-coming day made it every moment clearer, and as the morning sun topped the highest trees and shone over the lake, raising little wreaths of mist from its slimy depths, it shone also on a fine young male tiger who arose from the scattered remains of the dead buffalo to greet the commencement of a new day.

After all the serious talk of last night I murmured, so much was ~~my~~ brain still confused with facts and visions, after all those solemn warnings, the brute has yet risked life for greed. And forthwith a cloud of smoke was belched from my leafy recess and the forests rang and re-echoed with the sharp report. The air was full of the alarm notes of forest birds and animals thus rudely startled, whilst two quick short roars to my right and the hasty movement in the heavy grass there, told me that another tiger must have been witness of the scene just enacted.

I waited for him to break in the open and so

gain his forest retreat, but in this I was disappointed, for after a lapse of several minutes I saw him slowly and majestically stalk out of the deep grass some 300 yards off and walk up the steep bank into the sál forest whilst the convulsive twitch of his tail, as he disappeared, intimated that he was silently chuckling at having disappointed a sportsman for the hundredth time. As for his companion, on the shot being fired which had struck him full on the chest, he had reared straight up on his hind legs and beating the air furiously with his paws had fallen dead amongst the débris of his repast.



CHAPTER XII

The Supernatural in India

I. IN REFERENCE TO SPORT

THE natives of India have a firm belief in the supernatural, and, if we take that term as applying to occurrences inexplicable by any natural law with which we are at present acquainted, it may be granted that they have a wider range for startling experiences than we, hampered by the civilization of the West, can ever hope for. It is, however, with the supernatural as we understand it that this article deals, for in India the ignorant villager often accepts as a matter of course occurrences marvellous enough in our eyes ; whilst those individuals who by self-abnegation have, at least in their own belief, attained to powers denied to the majority consider their special gifts to be the reasonable result of the triumph of the spirit over the flesh.

It had been my fate to wander for many years in the jungles and waste places of Northern

India where also the "fakir," or religious mendicant resorts to avoid the temptations of the world, and to pass perhaps years in silent introspection. My life consisted in carrying out the duties of a forest officer, and in hunting big game ; his in the mortification of the flesh with a view to rising to a higher plane of existence, and I confess to a feeling of sympathy and respect for one who, unarmed and alone, could complacently camp out in forests infested with wild beasts, trusting to his divinities for his life and to the rare passenger for his subsistence. I had long known that some of these wanderers claimed the power of calling to any given spot any of the denizens of the jungle, but I had never put their powers to the test, for they invariably insisted on extorting a promise that the animal should not suffer for its obedience. I then considered that to observe and not to kill would be intolerable to the feelings of a keen sportsman, but age and experience have altered my views, and I regret the lost opportunities of the past.

It was, however, my good fortune in the month of April some fifteen years ago to meet with an individual who undoubtedly possessed a certain power over the wild animals in his

vicinity, and who did not scruple to use it to his own profit. It is not for me to say how this power was acquired, though I doubt if it was the result of self-mortification, and incline rather to the firm belief of the neighbouring villagers in attributing it to witchcraft. Be that as it may, the man was welcome even if his methods were not orthodox.

I had organized a small shooting party into Nepal in that year, my only companion my friend B., a good sportsman but a hasty shot ; whilst our outfit consisted of two howdah and four smaller elephants to form the line of beaters. With such a small party we did not expect much sport in that land of swamp and dense forest, we anticipated rather a week's tour in a new country with a little shooting to enliven the marches ; and crossing the border we encamped near a village about eight miles in Nepal as a preliminary start. My orderlies at once visited the village and returned with the usual news that the villagers knew of no tigers in the vicinity ; they added, however, that they had discovered an old man who made his living by selling charms to protect the cattle against any tiger they might chance to meet in their pasture grounds.

The two statements did not agree, but I knew that the villagers would give no information as to the whereabouts of a tiger, because, in the first place, they believed that the tiger would learn of their treachery and, if not killed, would make matters extremely disagreeable in the future ; whilst, secondly, they did not desire any strangers camping near their village. When we remember that there exists some belief in the transmigration of souls, and that the body of a tiger frequently envelops the spirit of a bold bad man of the past, the sentiments of this unsophisticated peasantry may be more readily understood.

The charm vendor, however, readily put in an appearance when sent for, and proved to be a wizened, emaciated and feeble old person who made no promises save that he would join in to-morrow's hunt, and asked for nothing but the gift of a goat and a bottle of rum to sacrifice to his deities. Both of these delicacies were supplied, and I am unaware how he disposed of them, but his bleary eyes and shaking hand when he appeared next morning were evidences of a night passed in vigils, whether festive or prayerful it is not possible to say.

He first begged to be placed on the largest

elephant, as he remarked that the tigers would specially resent his appearance as their enemy, and next drawing from his girdle a small copper bell he suspended it tinkling from finger and thumb, muttering at the same time some indistinguishable phrases ; then after apparently receiving some whispered instructions, he silently led the way through the forest, followed by the sportsmen, whose feelings varied between shamefacedness and contempt.

I must explain for the information of the uninitiated that at this season of the year the forest has already been devastated by jungle fires, and that only here and there are patches of unburnt grass left either by accident or on account of the dampness of the locality.

As a male tiger stands some three and a half feet high and weighs about 600 lb. I was both astonished and angry when the tiger charmer stopped at the edge of a small patch of grass which might have concealed a pig or deer, but certainly could not, in my opinion, afford suitable cover for a tiger. When, however, I represented this to the old man he merely replied : "The tiger is there," and we, proceeding through the grass, passed out on the other side without discovering any living creature. We

again appealed to our leader to cease his fooling and lead us to a more suitable spot, but were met by the same stolid reply. There was nothing to be done but to try again, and this time we discovered an immense tiger lying crouched between two elephants. He arose on being discovered and walked slowly in front of the howdah to the edge of the patch of grass ; there turning in a dazed way he calmly regarded us, and fell at once with a bullet behind the shoulder.

The extraordinary behaviour of this tiger impressed me more as a sportsman than the proceeding of the old man ; but we both acknowledged that the incident was in every way uncanny.

It was yet early in the day and, repeating the performance of the bell, we were at once led in a bee line to another tiger which also suffered itself to be slaughtered in a similar manner. To make a long story short, in five days we bagged six tigers and only desisted because the old man explained that if we killed off all the tigers his trade in charms would be ruined.

It will be understood that by this time we had grown familiar with the supernatural ; and, concluding that virtue lay in the bell, we offered large sums for its purchase ; these were sternly

declined, the owner protesting he would only part with it at his death and then only to his son. Then I attempted to persuade the old man to accompany me back to my forest headquarters, where there were tigers familiar with men, whose cunning so far had proved too much for the hunter, but this also he declined, saying that he was too old to travel. Softened, however, by the handsome present we made him, he consented to teach my orderly a charm which would deliver our own tigers into our hands, and with this we were fain to be content and parted good friends.

Not many days elapsed, and the memory of our adventure was still green when we desired the orderly to prepare the charm, as we intended to slay a very old and cunning tiger who haunted the vicinity of the forest bungalow, and soon the little rows and circles of rice and spices, lighted with tiny oil lamps, were ready and incantations more or less accurate were being completed ; then mounting an elephant we wandered along the river bank where we expected the tiger might be during the heat of the day. Personally I was full of faith in our venture, resolved in my own mind that if nothing happened it would be due to some omission

in our incantations ; and in this frame of thought I was not surprised to see our tiger arise from beneath a thorn bush in a most unlikely locality, and walk in the well-known dazed condition in front of the line of elephants.

His appearance and behaviour were greeted with a murmur of satisfaction and astonishment by the elephant drivers ; here, they said, is a beast we have all known for years, and who has already shown himself superior to our calculations ; to-day he is indifferent to his fate ; what manner of charm is this that can at a distance destroy his sense ?

Now my friend B. had not had his full share of shooting, and I determined that this trophy should fall to his gun. Calling up his elephant therefore I relinquished my place and followed in the procession which, headed by the tiger, was slowly advancing to the river. It is no doubt trying to the nerves to see a tiger do everything that in a normal condition he would never think of doing ; to see him traverse the sandy banks of the river, and wade across the stream in open day without signs of fear or hurry. But it was still more trying to see B. fire four shots at short range and to observe the tiger leisurely ascend the opposite bank and disappear

in impenetrable grass without a scratch. We had had our show, and lost our opportunity and silently regained our bungalow fully occupied with our own thoughts ; we had no charm to ensure straight powder.

I was shortly after transferred from these forests and saw the old tiger charmer no more. He may be still alive, his assumption of power may have been a deception, but though I have faced many tigers since that time I have never yet found one to behave in a similar way, or to yield up his life with such ease and indifference.

Let us change the scene from the heat and damp of the Nepal Terai to the snows and rocks of the Himalaya, where at an elevation of 15,000 feet the sportsman in the autumn hunts the mountain sheep, and, if lucky, occasionally gets a glimpse of the wily ounce, or of the lovely snow partridge. Here are a few scattered villages whose inhabitants till the terraced fields for a scanty crop of millet, and tend the apricot and walnut orchards, from whence they obtain oil for lighting and cooking, and dried fruit which give a relish to their frugal repasts. In winter they are snowed in for weeks and months at a time in their solid houses of stone slabs, and no doubt they see and hear wonders,

dwelling as they do on the roof of the world, that unknown region whence originate many of the powers of good and evil which rule the country below.

Can it be possible that these people who possess from our point of view little morality and no sense of honour, but who are yet the custodians of the most sacred shrines of Hinduism, who guard the temple at Ganjotri and guide the pilgrim's feet to the source of the Ganges, can it be possible that they, deteriorated as they are, still possess in some little measure the powers attained by their more pious ancestry? Or how otherwise can we explain the facts that they can converse with each other at distances far beyond the reach of the human voice; that they can to some small extent at least foretell the occurrences of the future, whilst the possession of these faculties is sufficiently common to create no surprise amongst their fellows.

The effects of the cyclone of September, 1880, penetrated far into the Himalaya; for three days at an elevation of 12,000 feet we, a few natives and myself, lived in peril of our lives amidst torrents of rain, sleet and snow, hearing the thunder of landslips and avalanches around

us and deafened by the furious rush of water in the valley below. To light a fire was impossible ; we waited wearily for annihilation and subsisted on what tinned meat we still possessed at the conclusion of a hunting trip. On the fourth day the skies cleared, and turning from the devastation around us we eagerly scanned the hillside opposite to ascertain if the village was still standing.

As the sun broke through the heavy banks of clouds we saw some forlorn individuals appear on their house roofs, apparently similarly engaged, and my companions at once opened a conversation with them in spite of the distance, which could not be less than one and a half miles, and in spite also of the fact that the river which flowed between almost drowned our voices when in conversation with each other. There was no apparent effort on our side, but no reply was intelligible to my untrained ear. Yet we asked for assistance and we received it when a few days later the water had subsided sufficiently to permit of a chain of fifteen strong men fording the river and rescuing us from starvation by cold and want of food.

Later on, when the frost had set in, when the glacier streams were at their lowest and the wild

leaves, a few scattered hairs, a little blood, mark the yielding to the first impulse of fear, and pain. But from thence to our untutored eye there is no further trail.

The tracker, however, proceeds slowly on his way, we have left the glade and are now in dense tree forest, each step appears cautious and yet assured : with hand or gun muzzle he points silently to a bent twig, to a broken blade of grass, to a spot of blood ; he likes us to take an interest in the work, to enjoy with him the bracing of the nerves, and the skill which is requisite for our safety.

The slanting rays of the morning sun now shine through the foliage and freckle the ground with light, one feels small beneath this lofty canopy, helpless in this confusion of grass where huge logs are lying or turreted anthills tower above our heads. Here and there is a tangle of gigantic creepers, they climb in spirals from the earth and constrict whole groups of trees, the bark is deeply cut with their coils, beneath their dense shade is many a lurking place ; we approach them with deference, listening carefully for the heavy breathing or muttered growl of the tiger. Occasionally there is a halt ; the tracker converses in low

tones with his assistant, they cast forward and, circling, take up the trail again ; or we reach the edge of a small ravine, the steep sides clothed with hanging vegetation, decidedly not a place to enter blindly until careful investigation has shown that the tiger has crossed without a halt. The work is now more arduous, one must stoop low over the faint trail, the sun is becoming powerful, the constant tension is fatiguing, the heavy rifle becomes a burden.

“ The wound has ceased to bleed, the tiger is making straight for the hills,” says the tracker ; his voice sounds anxious, he fears that we may be outdistanced ; we comfort him with the suggestion that the tiger will stop at the first water, but he grimly answers that the beast can go far with ten hours’ start. Depression falls on our little band, we feel discouraged ; at the outset we expected and dreaded a sudden charge at any moment ; now we hope for it, for any excitement to end our suspense. We become reckless and push on, hoping to find conclusive evidence of a fatal wound. The trackers object, we are spoiling the trail and making their task more hopeless ; we drop behind in silent despair.

A soft whistle attracts our attention, the two

men are bending over the ground where the impress of a huge form is distinctly visible ; a feeling of regret almost arises as one reads the signs, or listens to the terse utterances of the tracker. His manner is changed, hope now shines in his eyes, as he points out that the tiger must be badly hurt ; that he has not long left the spot, that the blood is still undried.

We follow the trail still more carefully, each moment is one of anxiety ; the beauties of the scenery are unnoticed at the time though our memories retain them for future enjoyment. We cross the broad level bed of a mountain stream, struggling through the deep soft sand, drinking at the tiny rill, the only relic of the vast flood that overflowed the banks in the Monsoon. The forest stretches away to the hills clothing them with many tinted foliage, a series of rocky precipices form the skyline ; to the south are the grass lands brilliant in the sun, great waves pass over them as the tall stems bend in the breeze ; the scattered clumps of bamboo look like verdant islands in a golden sea.

We pass in watchful expectation until the way is barred by a wall of the greenest grass, its vivid colouring is almost an affront to the

sober tints around us, it represents the presence of moisture on the arid slopes. We halt ; to attempt to penetrate this stronghold would be madness, we should be helpless in this mass of matted vegetation. Under the nodding plumes waving many feet above, little tunnels are visible, they are the pathways of wild animals and end in darkness. The trackers pass slowly round the obstruction, there is no trail leading out of it ; we mount a little hillock and see the tiny pool in its emerald setting, the soft mud all around marks the daily diminution of the water supply, the impressions of many feet are there, but they are indistinguishable.

We sit down and send the assistant tracker back for the elephant which is following distantly on our path. An hour passes slowly before a crashing through the forest heralds his return ; we mount in silence and, posting the assistant in a convenient tree to watch, plunge into the sea of grass. By the side of the pool there is ample evidence of the presence of the tiger. He has drunk and lain by the water to cool his heated sides.

We slowly re-enter the grass where towards the north its apex points to the hills, the watcher in the tree whistles a low warning and

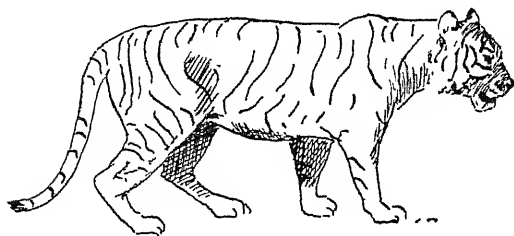
signs to our right, there the tops of the grass are trembling as some animal forces its way softly beneath ; we gently follow the moving stems. It is the moment for which we have hoped and laboured. The next instant the tiger steps into the open and stands glorious in the sunshine, his eyes glistening with rage, his jaws slightly open, flecks of foam on his black lips, his tail switching angrily.

As the sound of a shot echoes through the forest and rolls murmuring towards the hills he turns and charges with mighty bounds and hoarse roars towards us. Three more shots are fired in rapid succession and the tiger rolls over and over at the feet of the startled elephant. The tracker looks at me with a sigh of pleasure. " It was well done," he says ; our eyes glisten, each understands the other's thoughts.

The smoke curls from our rifle barrels and hastens on the breeze to join the blue cloud already entangled in the forest foliage. We stand round and survey our prize, the conflict has created, as it were, a well in the heavy grass, we look up to the tops of the flowering stems, the elephant utters contented purrings as her driver compliments her on her courage. " He is a mighty tiger," they all say ; and " the

sahib's bullets do not miss ! ” We hasten to point out the mortal wounds caused by the tracker's steady aim, and he accepts the well-earned compliment with delight.

Slowly we walk back to camp, dismissing the present and former adventures, and, arriving, pass by the eager questioners ; our nerves still tingle with excitement, it seems hard to resume once more our part in a busy, monotonous life. The feeling soon wears off, but not that of trust and affection for our fellow-hunters ; we shall always hope that in times of hardship or danger we may have as well-tried companions.



CHAPTER IV

A Forest Fire

IT is a stifling morning in June ; already an intense heat shimmers over the earth, man and beast are restlessly fighting against a sense of suffocation, the monsoon has delayed its arrival and the hot dry winds still scorch the land ; soon they will commence to blow with a cruel and unreasoning fury. Broad drives radiate from the forest hut, their straight-cut lines mark the efforts of man to secure dominion over the primeval forests ; but in the hazy distance the converging walls of vegetation close in on either hand, and the vast area seems to be once more hopelessly uncontrolled. In the centre of each drive is a dusty track bordered by wide belts of short green grass ; these clear open spaces in the dense forest serve as points of vantage when combating the relentless forest fires and present sometimes the sole way of escape for man and beast should defeat have to be acknowledged in the unequal contest.

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Far away on one of these drives a small cloud of dust appears ; in the present stillness of the air it is regarded with suspicion, which is intensified when through the glasses a man running is descried. He is indisputably the bearer of bad news, for no sane person would in this heat hurry to bring good tidings. In a few minutes the messenger is standing breathless in the verandah, in his hand is grasped a long-handled hatchet, his clothing consists of a crimson turban and a loin cloth of vague colouring ; his moist skin glistens like burnished bronze, his naked feet are thickly covered with yellow dust. In panting sentences he imparts his unwelcome report and finishes with an urgent appeal for aid.

The hope of a quiet day in the shelter of the hut vanishes ; instead you have the prospect of braving the heat and warring with the elements, the risk of health and perhaps of life in the protection of the forest. An hour later you arrive at the scene of the conflagration, and as you loosen the girths of your panting pony you learn the extent of the fire and the prospects of extinguishing it.

The jungle tribes are in great force, they sit in the shade and await orders ; to them it is

no new thing to see the forest burn, rather is it a novelty to observe the peculiarities of the white man who desires to save it. Their dress is of the scantiest, some wear headdresses hastily made from broad leaves as a protection against the sun ; all carry gourds of fantastic shape with a supply of water, for in this overwhelming heat one must drink or die. From the nearest well a slowly moving procession of brown figures bring water in larger vessels ; for the moment there are few signs of excitement or energy.

The crackling of the fire sensibly increases, on the slight breeze a dense smoke arises showing that the intensity of the flames is not yet sufficient to consume all the fuel offered to them ; little black spirals of grass are wafted in the air, occasionally a flaming spark first wildly soars on high then descending creates a little conflagration in advance. To extinguish the fire there is but a short period before the wind rises ; and at the word of command some 200 men attack the flames, beating them out with branches, encouraging each other with wild shouts, running to each other's aid as help is called for in sudden emergencies.

For an hour and more the work continues ; it

is evident that if we could bind the winds we might emerge successful from the task, but the breeze which has been rapidly increasing now bursts with fury on the scene, the smoke and flame are driven, bowing low, before it and the band of scorched, begrimed and exhausted workers fly headlong to the nearest clearance, where they rest, relating their experiences or caressing their wounds.

To extinguish is now beyond our power, but to attempt to control is still possible, and so throughout the relentless heat of the day we march parallel to the advance of the enemy counterfiring along the broad drive so, though we cannot stay the forward progress, to permit of no turning to right or left. In the early afternoon the fierce wind is blowing a gale, the roar of the flames is incessantly deafening, the atmosphere is blackened with the smoke, the forest resounds with the crash of falling timber. It is a transformation scene. In front of the fire the forest in its verdant beauty trembles as the breath of destruction passes over it, the leaves wither and fall, the grass writhes helplessly in the blast. Then follows the onslaught of the wall of flame; it envelops to a height of sixty feet or more the stalwart forest stems, it

engulfs the lesser forest growth, and leaves in its track a blackened waste lit with glowing sparks and leaping jets of light ; whilst high above the burning branches seem to be twisting in agony and almost to express relief when, crashing, they fall lifeless to join the smoking débris on the earth.

The wild animals are faring badly in this pandemonium, and the pretended wisdom of the monkey deserts him in this crisis. He climbs the loftiest trees, and there suffocated by the advance guard of smoke whole tribes fall with dull thumps to the earth and perish painlessly in the furnace. The elephant, the bear and the tiger are on the alert so soon as the scent of burning reaches them, and hurriedly rush across the wind until they have passed the line of fire and can turn and so gain security in the rear. The deer often lose their senses and run frantically down wind or even attempt to pass the wall of fire. The morrow will dawn on many a scene of suffering and death amongst the innocent dwellers in the forest ; and it will be long before the herds again peacefully graze in their old resorts.

At last the setting sun promises some relief from the violence of the gale and from the

intense heat, the fire is still rolling majestically to the north-east; some thirty square miles of blackened forest lie behind the conflagration, but there is hope that, aided by the stillness and damp of night, we shall be able to renew our defence and even perhaps to be successful in attack. Our exhausted army camp round a welcome streamlet and commence a frugal meal, then lay themselves wearily down for a few hours' rest.

It is past midnight when we once more overtake the line of fire now many miles in length, and, pressing forward some distance in advance, commence counterfiring from the front. Our line of attack appears at first feeble as it extends, a thin straight line along one side of a broad drive, but it soon gains intensity as the increasing heat creates a draught of air towards the flames. It is in fact not much less formidable than the original fire when they appear to rush on each other with fury and to meet in a stern struggle. The smoke and flames rise perpendicularly, and showers of the brightest sparks descend from the sky, then the lurid light dies out gradually along the line of battle, and we are left in the inky darkness, our eyes wounded with the acrid smoke. The forest is

dimly defined with thousands of flickering torches, whilst from minute to minute a resounding report is heard as some monarch of the jungle, who for centuries has withstood, reaches his final resting-place in a spray of sparks and in the transient flames provoked by his fall.

It is time to think of returning to camp and to rest; and as we lead the way followed by weary pattering feet the west is illuminated by many a flash of light, while at intervals a deep rumble is heard predicting the approach of a storm. We hurry, for to be caught amongst these burning stems would be far from pleasant. The spasmodic lightning increases in frequency, it becomes incessant, sheets of liquid blue seem to cover the sky and to run along the earth; the heavens respond with incessant murmurings, echoing louder and louder until the earth trembles with the vibration.

Now arrives the first breath of the storm, moisture laden and cool; you feel revived and invigorated as you draw in deep draughts with pleasure. The scent of wet earth pervades the atmosphere, and as you reach your camp a solid wall of rain advances blotting out the landscape, extinguishing the still flickering fires

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in the forest, refreshing the parched and burning soil.

It is not for you to complain that had the monsoon arrived twenty-four hours earlier you had been saved trouble and sorrow. It is enough to know as you lie listening to the down-pour of the waters that for some months at least the forest and those in it, both man and beast, need have no dread of a repetition of to-day's disasters.



CHAPTER V

Giants of the Forest

AMONGST the bamboos man is more helpless than an insect in a field of grass, for he has not proportionate powers of locomotion and endurance. He can neither overleap the vegetation like a grasshopper nor, like the ant, persistently ascend the stems to discover his whereabouts. He gropes in confused and shadowy arcades, repulsed by the grim resistance of the spiky stems, stumbling over the débris of the forest, blinded by the interlacing of low-bending shoots. Forty and more feet above his head the feathery stalks ceaselessly wave; they have no community of action, but bow this way and that at their pleasure, only protesting unanimously if the breeze annoys them with its vigour. When the air is calm they converse with graceful gestures, beckoning with suavest invitation.

Above—all is fascinating beauty of form and motion; below—there is the grimness of dusky solitude. Little paths wind through the

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forest, circumventing the clumps of bamboo, tending always towards the massive stem of some tall tree that calmly dominates the sea of restless vegetation ; such trees are as havens of refuge, you pass from one to another until your horizon brightens and at the edge of the forest you gaze over savannahs where single clumps of bamboo form the outposts of the main army.

A stream passes through the forest forming here and there stagnant pools choked with dead leaves, the soil around is disfigured with huge footprints, the wreckage of bamboo covers the ground, the splinters showing white against the sombre green ; it is evident that even the giant grasses cannot resist the other giants of the forest. As you view this scene of destruction the sound of breaking stems is borne on the evening breeze, you hear deep rumblings of pleasure mingled with shrill discordant cries ; a herd of elephants is grazing on the border of the forest. You advance cautiously up wind ; if you are careful the slight noise made by your approach will not alarm the herd, but you must beware lest you suddenly surprise a stray wanderer from the main body who will without doubt either endeavour to annihilate the intruder or raise the alarm by hasty flight.

You arrive, however, without incident at the verge of the plain and see the huge slate-coloured creatures moving restlessly around, pulling down the lofty stems or overturning whole clumps so that the calves may more easily reach the topmost shoots. There must be some fifteen or twenty elephants in sight, and, judging from the resounding crashes proceeding from the denser forest, others too must still be under cover. You watch for long the strange sight, noting the dexterity of the ponderous animals, how trunk and feet are used as occasion demands with power or gentleness, how the leaves are quickly stripped from the bending stalks, or the earth adhering to the uprooted grass daintily brushed off against the uplifted foot. The calves are constantly on the move, they pay visits to neighbouring families and express approbation or simulate fear with lifted trunks and shrill cries, then return to their ever-watchful mothers who, after momentary separations, receive them with deep purrings and caresses.

Where the grasslands cease in the shade of the forest a quick gleam of white proclaims the presence of a tusker ; he stands almost motionless whilst the anxious mothers detecting his

proximity issue strict instructions to their young ; they are not to stray and annoy the lord of the herd by their gambols, his sudden outbursts of ill temper are well known, and regrets come too late when once he gives vent to his violence. Now he shows himself in the open, an incarnation of savage strength. His black hide is covered with dust, the switching of his tail leaves broad stripes on his flanks, his little eyes gleam red in the evening light, his white tusks, curved and pointed, glance to and fro with the uneasy movement of his ponderous head. Lying behind a fallen log at no great distance you recognize that the animal is in that dangerously excited state that can only be described as frenzy ; you know that if discovered your chance of avoiding an attack is small, that you rather than he should secure safety in flight. With breathless interest you await the course of events.

The members of the herd hold no communication with this monster, they move aside as he approaches, but so quietly as to avoid giving offence ; at the slightest sign of ill temper the nursing mothers would be leading their young in swift retreat through the forest. The tusker moves slowly forward and stands not fifty

yards from your shelter, grim and sullen—suddenly his aspect changes, his huge ears extend at right angles to his head, his massive trunk waves slowly on high and finally comes to rest pointing in your direction, inhaling the hated odour of man. You feel that your presence is detected, and determine to make the best of an unpleasant predicament.

As the elephant furls his trunk in tight coils and raises his tusks you check the intended charge with a bullet in the chest ; the shock turns him, he loses in the confusion of the blow the direction of his foe, and passes in a wild charge within a few yards of your retreat. You greet him with a second shot, and he is gone with the irresistible fury of a tornado ; you feel the wind on your face, the earth shakes with the concussion of heavy footsteps, the bamboos are brushed aside like grass and saplings break with the impact or recover their position with a vicious whistling through the air. You reload your rifle and feel thankful you are rid of a knave !

Meanwhile in another direction the air is full of wild trumpeting rising above the thunder of the flying herd. They burst as a solid body through all obstacles, leaving a broad track of flattened vegetation through the forest. Occa-

sionally, senseless with fright and fury, an elephant turns and charges wildly at imaginary dangers, then resumes its headlong flight with shrill cries. The clamour dies gradually away ; it is almost dark when you cease to hear faint sounds echoing through the forest. You walk slowly back in the twilight, your sight becomes accustomed to the quickly spreading night, but you are glad when you see in the distance the glimmering of camp fires, when at last you step into the circle of light and comfort.

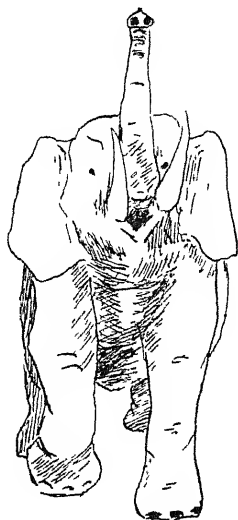
In the early morning you take up the trail to inquire into the result of this unexpected adventure ; you follow long on the track, finding here and there drops of blood or, where the elephant has halted, still more pronounced evidence of the wound. Progress is rapid where the forest is open, permitting you to see some distance ahead, but you lose time in circumventing suspicious patches of heavy grass or clumps of bamboo where your enemy may lie in ambush. Ultimately you arrive on the high bank of a sandy watercourse, and looking down note the footprints crossing the stream, leading into a mass of tangled vegetation on the further bank. You pass with caution, and peering anxiously around at last distinguish

the elephant standing motionless. He is hurt to the death and is unable to complete the ascent, he even dreads to trust his failing strength to retrace his steps to the level below. It is a piteous sight ! You creep carefully nearer and fire for the brain ; with the report the vast mass sinks to its knees, sliding down the bank and rolling over at its foot.

Your disinclination to the deed is overcome by the remembrance of the unprovoked attack of yesterday, you are buoyed by a feeling of gratified revenge. Yet you have in one moment destroyed a free life that has roamed these forests for three-quarters of a century, you have removed one of the chief interests of the jungle, and have left instead only a memory amongst the wild tribes who have long revered and feared this monarch of the herd.

Curiosity now impels you to follow the trail of the herd and you note how, after the first rush of alarm, they have relapsed into a quick walk in single file ; you can picture to yourself the staid and conscientious matron who led the retreat, the calves no longer playful are pressing to their mothers' sides, the young males shamble hastily with laid back ears ; uphill and down they pursue their way with a fixed knowledge

of their destination. One tusker loiters sometimes in the rear to protect the flying herd, he will no doubt later take the place of the departed leader. You follow till the sound of breaking branches warns you that the elephants have come to rest for the day, and that, unless you wish them to leave the country, you must withdraw in silence. You retrace your steps with the thought that your victim, though he may for a time be missed, will scarcely be regretted; you prefer to imagine that his power for evil was too great, perhaps too uncontrolled, to win the affections or trust of his fellows.



CHAPTER VI

Some Adventures

IT is unfortunate that in these reminiscences nothing theatrical is recorded, neither the sportsman nor his companions were maimed or killed, none of them had even a “tiger roaring in his ear.” The successful solitary sportsman neither invites nor shirks danger; he must have suitable weapons, and that confidence in them which comes alone with constant practice; he must be free from nervous excitement and his senses of hearing, sight and scent must be acute. He has to take the responsibility of his actions, whether affecting himself or others, for there is no retreat for him whatever his companions may do. And in these circumstances it is surely best that if possible one bullet should conclude the adventure, and that every endeavour should be made in this direction.

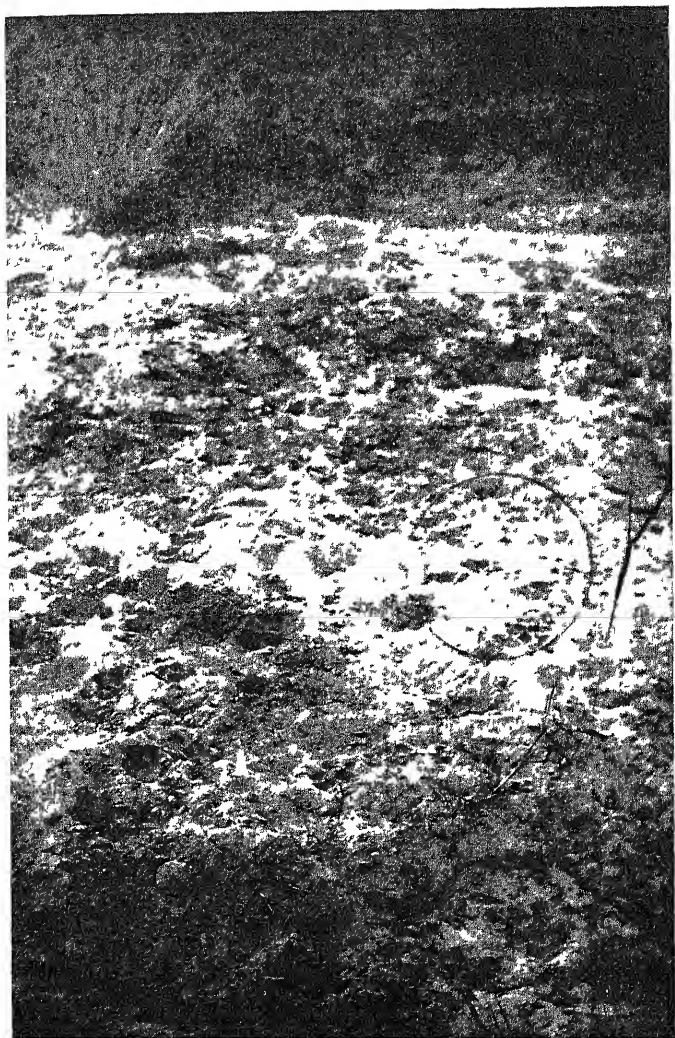
When an animal has recovered from the first shock of a severe wound it seems impossible to reproduce that effect: subsequent wounds

appear to be ineffective in paralysing result. The great thing is therefore with a fallen animal to prevent it getting up, and for this purpose it is advisable to get as near as possible and shoot to kill instantaneously. It is of course safer in every way not to shoot at all, but to satisfy one's instincts by getting into a position whence you could kill if you wished to. Equally, of course, no one will believe you and you will have no trophies for remembrance. But that shouldn't matter for you will be reasonably certain of a whole skin, and if you shoot you will not be.

TIGERS

There are adventures which might have ended in defeat but didn't, the balance just tipped in favour of the sportsman.

When a tiger takes up his or her quarters in the neighbourhood of a standing camp, the reason for this familiarity is at once investigated, a sense of uneasiness prevails, of suspicion, even of fear, for the proceeding must have some special object, opposed as it is to the natural habits of the animal. And so after a time the tiger becomes a chief source of conversation, and the occupants of the camp so nervous that they pass restless nights, often



FRESH TRACKS

arising to add fuel to the camp fire, and at the same time a stimulus to their fears.

Such a tigress caused annoyance to a camp on the upper reaches of the Ganges; fresh tracks were daily found and commented on, and no one had seen the intruder, and as Indians are firm in belief of ghosts and other evil spirits the matter became a nuisance to the only European in the camp. Buffaloes and goats of the most tasty were offered on the nightly perambulations of the tigress, but, as her tracks showed, she merely looked at them and passed on. Then one evening insistent alarm calls of a herd of deer were heard at about half a mile from the camp. It is the habit of the deer tribe when sighting a danger not to flee, but to keep it in sight uttering vociferous calls the while, until the danger removes itself, whether wild dog, panther or tiger, for to run offers the best chance of being caught by a speedy foe.

On hearing this commotion the sportsman reached for his ever-handly rifle, put a few cartridges in his pocket and, followed by an orderly, an innocent old Hindu, hastily went in the direction of the disturbance. He found the deer standing in a semicircle in thick cover, and they appeared too occupied to resent his

approach, but he could see no trace of any aggressor until moving quietly in the undergrowth he discovered quite near enough a tigress crouching ; he could see her rise and walk slowly away, but the jungle was so dense that it was out of the question to fire.

It struck him that this was the first time this tigress had been seen, and that it was probably the only chance of ridding the camp of a nuisance. He followed therefore as best he might, the orderly patiently stepping close behind his master, whom probably he thought demented ; and so the procession continued until the tigress reached an open space, and here she turned and snarlingly remarked that this folly must cease or there would be trouble. At least that was the only explanation of her attitude and expression. Unfortunately for her at that moment the bullet struck her behind the shoulder, and after wild leaps and bounds she fell gurgling to the earth. Her two followers lay behind a tree motionless and quite unpleasantly anxious until all was quiet, when they rose and congratulated each other on their bravery and skill.

Tigresses are more alert, agile and bad tem-

pered than tigers, they seem to resent any intrusion whether or not accidental; even without cubs they are not dependable, and with them invariably aggressive.

One hot-weather morning strolling along the edge of a patch of green grass, one was astonished to see a tigress doing identically the same thing. Man and beast thus proceeded at about thirty yards apart until the latter seemed to have enough exercise, and turning round faced her pursuer, lying in an attitude of readiness to attack. The sportsman raised his rifle and found he could not aim as a fly sat on the fire-sight, and want of accuracy possibly meant sudden death. He put down the rifle from his shoulder and removed the fly in some internal trepidation. When he again raised the rifle the tigress had gone a further step towards losing her temper. She now had her mouth open and was scolding vigorously, and as the shot was fired her head dropped and she remained motionless.

Hurry in approaching a wounded animal has been the cause of many tragedies, and on this occasion the sportsman waited for some time before moving. There was no visible wound and the natives again began to speak of witch-

craft, but when the trophy was being skinned that evening it was found that the bullet had entered the open mouth and passed into the brain. That was a legitimate source of self-congratulation.

At a forest bungalow on the Mohan River a man-eating tigress was becoming a scourge ; she too had never been seen by those who most feared her. The forester had been fishing in the river until dusk fell, when he called to his elephant and, without dismantling his rod, mounted her with his orderly to return home. Progress had to be slow and careful on account of the unwieldy sixteen-feet rod, and it was rapidly getting dark when the elephant shied violently at some unseen object, and when moving onward twice more the elephant with sidelong glance shied away from the track. This unusual behaviour had to be investigated, so the elephant was stopped while the ground around was carefully searched. There in the short eastern twilight, about ten yards away, a tigress was sitting on her haunches, like a dog, and gazing up at the elephant. It was too evident that she meant to spring and carry off one of the riders, for they were at most

some eight feet from the ground and a tiger can with a spring reach some eighteen feet, and standing on his hind legs some nine to ten feet.

The orderly hastily passed on the rifle, and when the shot rang out the tigress collapsed like an empty sack. The bullet cut her lower lip and passed through the neck into the chest. It is seldom that a tiger is instantaneously killed; shot through the heart so that that organ becomes just a mass of white strings, a tiger will run for 80 to 100 yards, and returning on his tracks will fall dead close to the sportsman who has given the mortal wound, and in these exciting ten or fifteen seconds some 600 lb. of maddened tiger can do serious damage.

Here is an adventure of some breathless moments where neither man nor beast was in any way injured. It was the habit of the sportsman to take long solitary rides of inspection always carrying a single-barrelled light rifle with him, and in this manner many a good stag had been killed, and at rare intervals such game as panther and wild dog. On the morning of this little adventure once more the alarm cry of deer attracted attention. They were in a forest of scattered trees with thick

undergrowth, and an attempt was made to approach them on foot and select the best stag of which there were several, as their horns could be seen above the foliage, though on foot at close quarters nothing was visible but moving legs and hoofs. A return was then made to the tethered horse, and he was ridden into the thicket in the hope that from above at least the head and neck of the deer could be seen and a shot from the saddle become possible.

The horse showed some reluctance to enter the undergrowth, but offered no serious objection, and ultimately a sight was revealed which very few human beings have seen at close quarters in similar conditions. A big buffalo bull lay dead, and on the further side looking over the body of his prey was a large and heavy male tiger.

That was indeed the sensation of a lifetime. For the man and horse escape was impossible, for the undergrowth was so thick that the horse could push his way through only at a slow walk ; even to turn was to invite assault, and had not the horse and rider been in full accord a wild flight would have followed in which at least the rider and probably also the horse would have been killed.

The momentary hour passed in rigid silence. Tiger and intruders gazed into each other's eyes. And then the tiger rose displaying all his power and beauty. For some instants he stood, apparently undecided, and then strode majestically away. Man and horse followed suit in the opposite direction, not without cold feelings in their backs, but the retreat was without incident.

Probably few sportsmen can truthfully say that they rode a tiger off his kill in thick jungle. And this one believes that if a tigress had been in question his career as a forester would have ended then and there. His friends remarked that no one but a d——d fool would have done it—and perhaps they were right.

Here is another story showing how easy it is and how some tigers behave in a quite inexplicable manner. The forest officer was staying with his district officer at a forest bungalow on the edge of the jungle. His head tracker came in the evening to say that there was a tiger in the neighbourhood and that the district officer was doing all he knew to bring it to bag. The forest officer replied that the other evidently did not want him to know anything

about it as he had said nothing, and he issued strict orders that no action whatever should be taken to interfere with the district officer's sport; he felt all the same that this secrecy was hardly complimentary, and that the district officer might have trusted more fully to the sporting instincts of the forest officer.

However, he said nothing and the two continued as if neither knew anything of the situation, though this needed some circumspection in conversation. The forest officer had occasion to roam through a near-by forest on inspection concerning the regeneration of the area. He sat on the elephant, as usual, between the mahout in front and the tracker at the back and proceeded leisurely through the somewhat dense tree-jungle, when suddenly the elephant stopped, the mahout whispered "Tiger," and there crouching a few feet away lay a tiger with his head between his forepaws and his hind legs drawn up. The rifle was not loaded, but the tracker handed it with two cartridges to the forest officer.

It is these moments of waiting which try the nerves. Would the tiger attack his unprepared visitors or would he run away? Either contingency was unpalatable. The tiger did

neither, he simply waited with unflinching gaze at the men above him. The bullet struck him between the eyes and he did not move.

"Is he dead?" the mahout was asked, and he replied "I don't know, but there is blood coming from his nostrils," and as the tiger was only about ten feet from the rifle muzzle it was assumed that he was dead. The district officer made no remark, and the two parted without any talk of secrecy on the one side and unintentional piracy on the other.

This close-quarter shooting calls to mind a day when the forest officer walking through the forest suddenly came upon a striped animal at his feet. It is useless to assert that he was not startled, he was so much so that his heart was in his throat. He fired both barrels of his rifle into this object and stepped back to reload out of harm's way. Nothing moved, and on a closer view a large male hyena was discovered, who had evidently been fast asleep and never awoke. So close was the shot that the two wads lay side by side on his hide, and the hair was burnt. The hyena was left where he lay, and the forest officer walked on very much on the alert, as he certainly was not before this encounter.

BUFFALO AND BISON

Enough of tigers. Of the scores shot each one is an adventure to the solitary sportsman, for even if danger is absent a considerable amount of experience and skill is needed, more especially if one restricts oneself to the hunting of mature males. Then days, even weeks of tracking and observation are necessary for success ; for the zest of the sport is centred in the fact that no two tigers behave the same in identical circumstances. The one is ferocious, the next cowardly ; the one alert, the other lazy ; the one timid, the other aggressive ; and so temperaments have to be studied if possible before a meeting takes place.

With buffalo and bison the matter is different. Both have the keenest scent, and both remove themselves from the neighbourhood of man as soon as he is detected ; both, when wounded, become not only fierce but vindictive, they will hunt the hunter with the utmost fury, and though of immense size and weight they are able to conceal themselves in grass or undergrowth in a manner both surprising and disconcerting.

A bison bull will stand eighteen hands high at the withers. His body is of a deep chocolate ;

his legs white below the knee ; his eyes of a beautiful light blue. The buffalo may be six or eight inches less tall, he is not beautiful save as an example of reckless strength and courage. Either may weigh the best part of a ton, and to hear them crashing through the jungle, climbing and descending hills, with the agility of goats, fills one with admiration for some of the noblest animals in creation.

This sportsman had never the desire to slaughter these noble beasts, he was content to stalk and observe ; but on occasion he had to shoot to satisfy his host who thought he wanted to.

In the vast forests of central India to arise at 3 a.m. and before the dawn to plunge into the waste is a sensation that remains and returns. The country is broken with low hills, showing bare rock, or covered with bamboos ; the narrow precipitous valleys are filled with trees, light mists blow hither and thither and everything at a few yards distant is indistinct and suggestive, herds of deer move away at the sound of approach and a tiger is uttering a moaning cry in the distance.

On the elephant sat the sportsman, the mahout, and a more or less naked forest

aboriginal whose speciality was that he did not know how to lie—not being civilized—and the possession of eyesight so keen that he could follow a trail across rocky ground at a run most disconcerting to his civilized companion. He had the evening before seen a herd of bison and was making straight for that spot, intending to follow a trail now some ten hours old ; he hoped that the bison would still be loitering in the neighbourhood, but if not, then there were some twelve hours of daylight before him.

Arrived at his yesterday's point of observation he and the sportsman left the elephant to follow at a distance and busied themselves in examining the ground. Two bulls, one of size, three or four cows, and a couple of calves were at least a part of this herd, and the trail of the bull was singled out and followed in silence and with the greatest circumspection. The sportsman had nothing to do but follow, the tracker was so infinitely superior in jungle lore that it was a joy to observe him.

The tracking went on through the pathless forest, through tree or bamboo thickets, up the steep dry hills and down into the shaded valleys until the sun was well up in the East and the day became hot and tiring. The

tracker stopped. The bull must be somewhere near, he said, he is not alarmed and so will not travel in the heat. This was a warning to keep close and have the rifle ready.

Another half-hour, when passing through a dense bamboo thicket the tracker stopped. "He is there," he whispered. The sportsman stood and gazed into the thick undergrowth; he made out sometimes the feet and sometimes the backs of moving animals, to startle them meant further hours of tracking of frightened animals, but to kill a cow bison was to incur a heavy fine, and worse still the loss of reputation. He took out his field glasses, but they merely magnified his difficulties.

And then he saw a sapling violently swinging to and fro. It was a bison polishing his or her horns on the young bark. The tension became too great to be continued, any sudden wind eddy might warn of the neighbourhood of man standing within twenty or thirty yards of the herd. The sapling swayed yet more violently and dimly a huge form was outlined between the bamboo stems. The shot echoing through the forest was followed by a stampede crashing through the undergrowth. The sportsman reloaded and stood waiting for events, he

turned towards the tracker, but the man with the agility of a squirrel sat some fifteen feet above his head in a tree. When one is naked and unarmed, safety first is a legitimate slogan !

There was silence in the jungle, and when convenient to his state of mind the tracker descended. " I last saw that bull," he said, " running swiftly towards the valley—and here is blood." It was the turn of the sportsman to lead, and the track even for him was easy to follow. Soon on the opposite slope a dark mass came into sight. " That is the bison," the tracker said, " and he is lying down." Another cautious advance and we stood over him. The tracker was joyful, the sportsman felt no elation, only sorry he had killed so glorious a creature, and that nothing would induce him to repeat the crime.

" How far from Camp ? " was asked. The tracker looked around him and gazed into the sky. " About two hours will bring us there," he said. And it did.

There was a camp in Central India under a few shady trees, whilst all around extended a level sandy plain, though in the near distance tree forest was visible. When the sun is well

up in the sky there seems to be no beauty in the landscape which is empty and silent. Then is the time when the forest officer sets himself to office work until the heat of the day is over and the evening shadows invite both man and beast to roam abroad.

The forest officer had with him his district officer who was ever eager to offer hospitality in the shape of sport. Not all district officers are so inclined, for they have to pass months within the area of their charge, and it is small wonder that they do not wish the best of their sport annexed by a passing visitor. But on this occasion the district officer was convinced that his visitor wanted to shoot a buffalo (which he didn't) and that it was up to him to see that he produced one.

It was about midday when the district officer appeared leading a tracker whose appearance was much against him. He seemed to be an emancipated aborigine such as generally collect all the vices of the West and forget the virtues of the East. The man had seen fresh buffalo tracks in the neighbourhood and seemed anxious to follow them ; but whether or not he intended a successful issue to the stalk is doubtful, for such as he often live on the tyro

in whose service they remain until discovered in alarming the game when approached within range ; in short, they do not want a source of revenue to be bagged. The district officer offered his visitor his new high-velocity rifle which he wished to have tried, and the offer had to be accepted, however reluctantly, for to experiment with a new weapon in dangerous game is not a proceeding which commends itself to the solitary sportsman.

The pair then set out, and crossing the dry sandy plain soon found fresh tracks which were readily followed ; there were no trees or shelter of any kind and one could see ahead for some hundreds of yards. And presently the silence was broken by the sound as if of a galloping squadron of cavalry which drew nearer and nearer, and a trio of buffalo bulls came into sight at full gallop directly towards the sportsman. There was no way of retreat from this invasion, not a solitary tree or bush behind which to hide, and the only course was to stand one's ground and hope for the best.

As usual, the largest bull brought up the rear, and as the trio came within a few yards of the sportsman they suddenly stopped and gazed at him in astonishment. The buffalo holds

his head horizontally, so that his horns lie on each side of his body, and a facing shot at the forehead strikes at an angle and the bullet merely glances off the hard frontal bone. Then the only chance was to aim below the base of the horn where the ear covered all sight of the neck.

Firing with the new rifle the big bull pitched forward on his head and lay still, the other two fled over the plain. The wretched tracker then discharged the spare rifle into the dead buffalo, for which act, had he not been another man's servant, he would have been soundly thrashed, for his duty was to hand on a loaded not an empty weapon.

This little adventure did not take more than one or two hours. The bullet had passed under the horn, through the ear and smashed the spine in the neck, so that death was instantaneous. Again regret at this slaughter, but in this case it was entirely the fault of the buffalo who, having galloped up to the sportsman, should have annihilated him. The hasty return in their tracks was probably due to having winded or met some danger in the path they were following.

CHAPTER VII

Three Misadventures

I

A TENT was pitched on a wide plain, a sea of high grasses in the autumn months, but now covered with the tender green of the regrowth after burning. To the south a turgid river flowed slowly between high, sandy banks, and a thousand logs lay in orderly rows on either side. They were waiting for the monsoon floods to carry them hundreds of miles to the railhead where the saw-mills were ready to change trees into timber. To the north was a heavy fringe of forest ; and above this the blue hills of Nepal. On clear evenings the snow peaks of the Himalaya were defined against the pale blue of the horizon.

The deer came in herds to feed on the succulent young grass. From the tent door they could be watched, each herd separate, led by an old hind and followed by the stags. At night their alarm calls resounded when disturbed by

tiger, panther or wild dog, and then often the hasty pattering of feet would tell how some sudden danger was escaped.

A man sat in the tent at a table covered with papers. On the floor squatted a Brahmin clerk who read out in a monotonous tone in the vernacular one after another of a pile of letters beside him. He entered on each the order received and placed it to one side. The orderly at the door said :

“ A man has come.”

Both the officer and the Brahmin became alive. The former went outside by one door, the Brahmin gathered up his papers and left hurriedly by the other.

The visitor did not move. He was dressed in a loin cloth and a heavy black blanket, on his feet were wooden sandals, in his hands a stout bamboo staff. Tall and finely made, his regular aquiline features reminded of Jewish origin. He was of the wandering tribe of “ Gujars ” who drive large herds of buffaloes to pasture in the hills up to 10 or 12,000 feet in the summer and back to the plain forests in the winter. It is well when approaching their camp to get a convoy of some small urchins to protect one from these half-wild cattle.

Greetings were exchanged.

"A tiger has killed two of my milch cows," he said. "I would be glad if you would come and shoot him."

"Do you know where he is?" was asked, and the answer:

"I can lead you on top of him."

The elephant was soon ready and a start was made, the Gujar stamping along in his wooden sandals, voicing his rage to all the forest. Had there been need for secrecy he would have gone barefoot, but such an insult from a wretched tiger he could not brook. After about two hours of this noisy progress a ford over a small stream was reached; there were several carts, the bullocks unharnessed, the men squatting all but naked around little fires, cooking their midday meal. The Gujar pointed with his staff to a small patch of short grass near by.

"He is there," he said, but it seemed to be absurd that amid this quiet scene of Eastern travel this unarmed and blanketed Gujar should make such a statement. The elephant went forward in a far-from-alert manner and then stopped dead, throwing the man in the howdah violently against the front rail. At his feet



THE ELEPHANT IS RIDING

sheep at their best, we went together to the glacier, camping in a meadow that in a few weeks would be hidden under twenty feet of snow, and there around the camp fire we fell to talking of witchcraft, and I related some of my experiences to these wild mountaineers. One of them to my delight claimed the power of replying when in a trance to any question concerning the future, and at once at my request commenced the well-known dervish dance, ending apparently in an epileptic fit and insensibility. From him, by judicious questioning, I gathered all the events of the morrow, and having offered copious draughts of spirits we all retired to rest.

Incredible as it may seem, it is a fact that the occurrences of the next day fell out as foretold. That the country we visited was as described is not perhaps to be wondered at, for the hunters may have followed the line prescribed by their companion. But that we should have seen the number of animals foretold in the places pointed out, that all details even of sex should be accurate, and that the number of shots fired and their results should be known beforehand, was at the time inexplicable to me and, I fear, must remain so.

Such are some instances of occurrences which cease to compel surprise in those who wander in strange lands, but rather direct attention to the incomplete development of the powers of mind or soul in the more civilized races of mankind. The reasoning power of the savage is no doubt as incomparably below that of the average European as his independence is higher, and much as we despise his inferiority when in a civilized country we cannot fail to recognize his vast superiority when the appliances of civilization are wanting. His manual dexterity, his power of observation, his physical endurance, are all superior to ours, and when to these we add other powers as indicated in this article our contempt may change to admiration and we may be forced to acknowledge that the progress of nations may entail the loss of independence by the individual and perhaps also the relinquishing of certain powers, useful if not perhaps absolutely necessary in a savage state.

II. IN EVERYDAY LIFE

When one lives amongst a people who are absolutely convinced of the existence of ghosts and of the bodily presence of evil spirits ; when one finds as a matter of daily routine offerings

displayed for the one and dwelling places erected for the other, one becomes interested in the confidence of one's neighbours and maybe anxious to become personally convinced of the reason of the faith that is in them.

Up to the present time men and animals are "overlooked" in India, and it is unlucky to compliment your native friend on his personal appearance, on the beauty of his children, on the superiority of his cattle ; for it is an accepted fact that by so doing you may become the despoiler of that which has excited your admiration. What we call coincidence the native classifies as effect, he is content to communicate disease or trouble to man or beast in the belief that it will leave his household, if by exposing food or coin on the highway he can tempt the ignorant or unwary to accept his offering ; he is a firm believer in a thousand unlucky acts, dates or marks, and he exhibits a childish terror of any unusual sights or sounds which may come to his notice after sunset. Happily his senses are not, as a rule, acute, and as he is either lost in the deepest thought as to the price of foodstuffs, or shouting at the top of his voice in a circle of friends, he remains often insensible to a real danger in his neighbourhood.

Contact with civilization doubtless destroys faith in the supernatural ; it may be that familiar spirits cannot abide the whirl and hurry of busy life ; perhaps too they become disgusted by the neglect shown to them in crowded cities, and so remove to the wilderness where at least they are treated with respect and kindness. Thus the witchcraft of the aboriginal dies away in the shadow of the law courts of British rule, though sometimes we are startled by a recrudescence of the ancient beliefs, as testified by a cold-blooded murder for the sake of discovering hidden treasure, or in the brutal ill-treatment of some unfortunate individual who has been credited with bewitching man or beast.

We view these outbreaks with horror, but we forget how far we have provided the incentive to the crime in intensifying the struggle for existence, in creating the lust for wealth, which are not amongst the temptations of a primitive people. Their superstitions are, as a rule, harmless ; they strive to avert the ill will of their divinities by offerings and by adoration, nor do they deliberately undertake to improve their position by the trouble or death of their neighbours. Yet even now in the busy haunts

of men we find, in those old-fashioned houses, still standing as evidence of the first attempt of the white man in the direction of home comforts, belated ghosts appearing in proof of long-forgotten tragedies, who will probably continue to appear until the building is replaced by a more modern residence and the past become stale even to the most persistent apparition.

Such an ancient building was occupied by C., a Government official holding a high appointment, and moreover a student with a well-balanced mind. To him appeared one day as he sat at his writing-table a pair of twinkling feet that whirled round the room in a giddy dance. No sane person could deny a feeling of astonishment at such a sight; in C.'s case the greatest interest was also aroused, and after careful scrutiny he came to the conclusion that the extremities were those of a native dancing girl. The next step was to convince himself that this was no hallucination of a heated brain, he called therefore for his native valet and watched the man's demeanour when he entered the room. The proof was as startling as it was complete. An expression of surprise gave way to one of horror on the man's face and he flung up his arms, shrieking that

he had seen the dancing girl and must die. Which, moreover, he did next day. C., although misliking the topic immensely, felt it right to make further inquiries, and then he learnt that many had seen the feet and came to no harm, whilst those who saw the whole of the figure invariably died within twenty-four hours.

I have noticed that the principal actors in such scenes are extremely reticent, probably on account of the fear of disbelief by others, and also perhaps because their own beliefs have received a shock from which recovery is slow. C. made no exception to this rule, and this true history has not obtained any wide circulation even amongst his personal friends.

On the other hand, we have all heard the authentic story which created some stir in India many years ago ; how three Englishmen dispossessed a " fakir " of his hut and garden and built themselves a house on the stolen site. How the " fakir " cursed them and predicted the death of all three within the year ; how the trio were watched by their neighbours, and, we may imagine, watched each other's fate with horror as one was removed by epidemic, another by an accident and the third in some other unnatural manner.

For my own part I would not willingly incur the ill will of one who claims supernatural powers ; on the contrary, I treat him with respect and consideration, and am glad to see him go in peace, content if in exchange for my offering he gives me his blessing or maybe, as a powerful charm, some of the ashes off his sacred body ! I have no desire to try by personal experience the efficacy of his witchcraft, and this is a good example of the triumph of experience over beliefs instilled from earliest childhood.

It is perhaps now time to confess that with all my eagerness and in spite of offering large rewards I have never interviewed an Indian ghost, I mean that my eyes have never beheld a demon or spirit, though I have been in their vicinity, heard them when going through their dreary routine, and even observed the visible signs of their displeasure. Thus I have twice lived in haunted houses and twice pitched my camp on the site occupied by a spirit. I have also heard tales vouched for as true by those whose veracity I had no cause to doubt, and the result of my experiences has left me without definite convictions, but certainly with a leaning towards the belief of the Hindustani ; for these experiences have convinced me that there is at

least a grain of truth amongst all the exaggerations and distortion of fact which surround us.

My first haunted house was in a small hill station, and the haunt consisted in the perambulation of the stone-flagged verandah by heavy footsteps. I was first introduced to this ghost when nothing was further from my thoughts than the supernatural, for some days had elapsed since occupying the house and the ghost had escaped my memory. I was therefore indignant when I imagined I heard some one walking in the verandah at night, some one who rudely would not reply to my challenge ; so that it was not until I was investigating matters with a lantern, thinking chiefly of burglars, that the peculiarities of the house flashed into my mind.

I felt certain then that I should meet that ghost ; I even hoped that he would not put me to shame by appearing in clothes, for I knew that my future audience might tolerate a spirit body but never a spirit suit of clothes. I spent hours in waylaying the footsteps ; I concealed myself in sight of the verandah in and outside the house ; I spread flour on the flags to obtain the imprint of his footsteps, but all in vain, I discovered nothing, and the walking continued.

It did no harm, except that my servants would not enter the house after nightfall save by the back door. That these footfalls were not caused by human agency both I and the natives all agreed ; for no other suitable explanation has yet been brought forward.

Still such tales are commonplace ; we need not traverse the Indian Ocean to hear of the spirit that haunts occupied houses and proves thereby a familiarity which lessens the charm of the supernatural. More interesting are those demons who dwell in the lofty and shadiest trees in the vast jungles of India ; who frequent the summit of the windswept passes of the Himalaya, or live in those chasms which the mountaineer bridges with his frail rope of twig or elastic sapling. Such spirits are part of the life and belief of the people and are fortunately easy to propitiate ; if you desire the shade of his tree for your midday rest, why not politely offer the owner a portion of your food ; if you cross the summit of his pass, why not place a stone on the goodly pile already raised by hundreds of believers ; and before you trust yourself to the swinging footway over the chasm, why not add your scrap of clothing to the pennants of many colours already flying

in the breeze. It may please the mysterious being and it will at all events satisfy your followers that you acknowledge that you do not trust entirely to your luck to overcome the real or fancied dangers that surround you and them.

My second haunted house was in a deserted village in dense forest ; it was a good weather-tight peasants' house of wood and stone, and I desired to utilize it as a shooting box in the winter, as a protection against the heat of the summer months. But I truly reckoned without my host, for each night was a time of danger and unrest on account of the volleys of stones which descended from all sides. This, I was aware, was a favourite trick of the Hindustani servant to express disapproval of his master's actions or surroundings, but I took the precaution to have all my servants in the house at night, whilst I knew that no villagers would dare to cross the forest at night to play a trick on an official. Moreover, the state of uneasiness my servants were in acquitted them of all connivance in the matter, and I was compelled to accept the verdict that my presence was distasteful to the shadowy tenant and thus to leave him in undisturbed enjoyment of his own, for fear he should proceed to further violence.

So much for the professional and amateur house-haunting ghost. Much more numerous are those who live in the wilderness and who in proportion as their power is great are provided by their admirers with food, flowers, water and even house accommodation. In some instances the sacred spot is enclosed by a fence within which the demon may sit undisturbed by trespassing cattle ; for evidently it is better to keep the cattle from annoying the spirit than to vex him into causing sickness or death amongst the unorthodox herds.

To suit my own convenience and in spite of the expostulations of my servants, I pitched camp one day on a spot of evil repute, near a burning ghat on the River Ganges ; the weather was hot and there was, I considered, space enough for ourselves and for the local demon ; but to him I paid no attention, and night fell on groups of nervous servants huddled for mutual protection round the camp fires. My companion G. was one of the most powerful men I had ever met, he was in robust health and laughed to scorn any belief in the supernatural. Yet during the night I was awakened by lusty calls for help, and full of thoughts of man-eating tigers or rogue elephants I seized

my rifle and rushed to his tent. I found him alone, but in a piteous state of terror. He declared that he had watched a human hand appear through the curtained doorway and descend slowly towards his head ; that he was powerless to move, to grasp his weapons or otherwise resist this horror, that he was seized with a terror unreasoning and disproportionate to the threatened evil, and only found his voice to call for help when he had already felt a clammy pressure on his face.

Now this may sound very like the agonies of a nightmare, but the natives accepted the story as a proof of the inevitable result of intrusion on the spirit of the grove ; my friend was absolutely convinced of the truth of the apparition, and as usual in such cases declined to discuss the matter further ; thus I alone was left doubting, yet believing enough not to risk a second night and perhaps further trials in this unpleasant spot. In the frame of mind in which one finds oneself when dwelling amongst the supernatural one is inclined to take no risks. If I am assured that the shrine by the roadside is occupied by a spirit who resents the wayfarer riding past his abode, and punishes his rashness with fever or other ills,

I take the trouble to dismount and sacrifice my pride for three minutes rather than have a chorus of "I told you so" for a week after round my fevered pillow. Such a position is, I think, more reasonable than declining to sit thirteen at a table, or fearing a misfortune after upsetting the salt, for the coincidence is apt to be much more marked in one case than in the other. You may practise with the salt-cellar for many days without unfavourable results, but I should be surprised if you escaped the punishment due to intentional rudeness or neglect to a sylvan demon.

I am reminded of another incident when two of my servants, Mohammedan unbelievers in ghosts and witchcraft, elected to sleep one night in a hut provided by the friendly villagers for the use of a spirit who frequented some large tree in the neighbourhood. The weather was wet and stormy, and in spite of repeated warnings these men determined to annex the demon's dwelling rather than to pass a cheerless night. Had they only paid proper respect to their host no doubt he would not have resented their intrusion ; as it was, they passed the night without disturbance, were looked at with interest by the villagers next morning, and before

sunset the one was incapacitated with fever, the other with an abscess on his foot. They still say that they have no belief in the supernatural, but I know that nothing would again induce them to a similar trespass for fear that worse should befall them.

It is indeed interesting to contemplate from the point of view of the dweller in the forest the inexplicable forces which surround him. Your disbelief or contempt do not shake his faith, though he may admit that you do not come under the same rules which govern his life; your arguments will not turn him from his belief, for he has nothing to gain from a change of opinion, and may indeed suffer severely in consequence. It is best, therefore, in every way to acquiesce at least outwardly in his theories, for only by so doing do you learn much that would be otherwise hidden from you, only by so doing can you hope to succeed in gradually gaining the confidence of your companion, though the penalty may be that you lose your own.



CHAPTER XIII

Duels with Panthers

IT has been truly written that a great part of a man's passion for sport is that he loves the pauses, and those gleams of colour and beauty with which Nature condescends to solace the endless waiting hours ; and he who would hunt the panther must have many pauses and stand in need of much solace.

Far from avoiding the vicinity of man the panther seems to take a special pleasure in getting the better of him both by cunning and boldness ; and, though nothing but the direst necessity will induce him to fight, yet should that necessity arise, he is thrice armed for the battle ; for he possesses strength and agility, wisdom and ferocity, and above all he knows, as few wild animals do, how to make the best of his opportunities ; and yet, if you condescend to give him credit for an infinite forethought, if you acknowledge his manifold accomplishments, study his habits and learn by intimacy

his impulses you may occasionally prove yourself superior in woodcraft even to the panther, and then also may be pardoned for experiencing a glow of satisfaction at having outwitted the cleverest of animals.

Of the line of elephants lurching through the summer grasslands I have not here to write ; for one panther that this array forces into the open to be riddled by a storm of bullets there will haply be a score that lie snugly between the elephants' feet till the invasion be past. Nor of the clamorous beaters in the noonday forest need mention be made ; for the panther well knows that death lies in wait in front, and either securely hidden in a leafy tree allows the timid rabble to pass him unobserved, or approaching, himself undetected, within reach of the guns, charges suddenly with the loudest roars into the assembled beaters and escapes unscathed in the noisy confusion, leaving, maybe, his mark on one or more of the unwilling villagers. Rather would I tell of duels between man and panther where the opponents are more equally matched ; when the man knows that the least false movement must lead to disappointment, when the animal is aware of the pursuit and seems to take a savage joy

in evading it. And even here, as with all big game shooting, an unequal fight is waged, for man has the advantage of delivering, at his own good time, the first blow, and it is his fault if, therewith, half the battle is not won.

The interest of panther shooting is centred in the woodcraft necessary to bring the panther up to the gun. The animal has then been outwitted, and the subsequent proceedings depend on the individuality of the sportsman and on his good luck ; for the novice may bungle and miss his shot ; and the experienced shikari may fail to take advantage of the momentary opportunity offered to him. The panther is surely the most noiseless beast of the forest ; he passes through the undergrowth and grass without a sound, and will advance over the parched earth covered with dry leaves without attracting the attention of the most careful listener. Softly his velvet paws are thrust under the crackling foliage until they feel the firm soil, and with infinite patience is every step taken towards his object. Then at times, the better to locate his prey in the tall grass, he climbs still silently the smoothest stems and lies along the horizontal boughs to

fall headlong with a weight of 200 lbs. or more on unsuspecting enemy or victim. When on the earth his glances are continually directed upward, and it is from the necessity of overlooking the tall undergrowth, and from no idea of safety or other advantage gained in assuming what must be always a more conspicuous position, that the hunter is as a rule forced to take his post above ground level.

The panther as a rule avoids the denser forests, where the tiger by his superior height and weight more easily moves through the tangled vegetation. Rather he affects more open jungle and ravines in the vicinity of cultivation, where he may during the hours of darkness indulge in his thievish propensities by raids on the cattle and goats of his neighbours ; where also during the day he may find safe hiding along the streams by whose sides, owing to the constant moisture, the rankest vegetation flourishes at all seasons. The north of the district of Bahraich in the Province of Oudh provides for him an ideal dwelling place, where he is still to be found in sufficient numbers by the careful inquirer. From this locality the writer has removed many panthers, the most successful month's sport producing a bag

of ten, although undivided attention was not devoted to this species.

The most exciting manner of bringing the panther to bag, is to call him up to the gun by means of a friendly goat. Imagine yourself then perched in the boughs of a leafy tree a few feet from the earth; the light bamboo framework in which you sit permits of your squatting cross-legged, but not of moving from a position once selected. You are hidden by carefully arranged festoons of foliage, in which one opening allows you to see and fire in one direction only. Evening is drawing in; the wind which has blown sharply all day is dying away with the sunlight, the shadows are becoming denser, the forest is awakening with the approach of night. From the distance comes the goat herd's call undulating in the breeze, and in response the black goat, tethered some ten yards away from your perch, utters hoarse cries as she tugs and strains at the restraining cord. It is the critical moment for any game in the vicinity. One may indeed wait on for the arrival of more distant and unbidden visitors, but if your trackers have done their work satisfactorily, the chief guest should put in an appearance during the next ten minutes.

Already, though your shikaris are still within hail, you deem it almost impossible that you should be able to remain motionless a minute longer ; every joint is rebelling against an enforced inaction, even your hands feel cramped as they hold the rifle across your knees.

The goat suddenly becomes silent ; you cautiously look to see if she is playing you false, but you observe that she is standing rigid, gazing in one direction ; from time to time she stamps her forefeet and shakes her long ears, but without altering her fixed stare. You follow the direction of her eyes but can detect nothing. The silence is intense, the beating of your heart is clearly audible to yourself, it seems as if it might also be heard both by your bait and by the panther. Then suddenly there is a crash ; in two bounds the panther has covered forty feet, and, alighting within three yards of the goat, with forelegs stiff and extended he ploughs up the sand and leaves, and comes to a halt before his victim. It is a cruel sight, the panther with fur erect, with ears laid back to his rounded skull, his eyes blazing with the thirst for blood ; the goat drawn up in silence with horns feebly pointed at her butcher, showing the finest courage in

her necessity. You have but the fraction of a second to save a faithful servant from destruction, and as you press the trigger and the smoke belches forth from your leafy bower you hear a succession of short roars, a rushing through the underwood ; the goat looks up and recognizes her safety in the presence of man and bleats a soft acknowledgment.

Now the trackers, warned by the shot, arrive and you examine the ground to ascertain the effects of your shot. One of many accidents may have marred it ; undue haste, the deflection of the bullet by twig or grass, an unforeseen movement on the part of the panther. Slowly you follow the blood trail through the bent and twisted grasses ; within sixty yards all traces of the hurried flight vanish ; you are content to find a sparse sprinkling of blood to prove that you are still on the track. You approach a narrow water-course lined with high grass and stop, tensely expectant as a slight movement is heard ; the next instant the panther bounds heavily away, and the momentary glimpse he allows shows a foreleg disabled. You have fired too low and too far forward, and must make for yourself a second opportunity. The trail crosses a forest road, and you pass with

despatch that exposed position ; then re-entering the underwood the tracker touches your arm. At the same instant you, too, have discerned at a distance of only a few feet those evil yellow eyes that gaze wrathfully at yours. You must stop the spring that is imminent, and there is a sigh of relief when no response comes to your shot, when the dark mass under the green foliage lies still, save for the twitching tail.

Such is a typical instance of panther shooting with a live bait ; many such might be related varying sufficiently in detail to prevent interest in the sport from flagging, and each conveying new lessons both in woodcraft and in natural history. More monotonous is panther shooting over a kill ; here the period of waiting is prolonged ; the hunter must be, if possible, more circumspect, and the chances of success, when the time and direction of approach are unknown, are less than when the live bait is used.

My wife and I were perched one evening over the scanty remains of a goat that had been offered in sacrifice to a celebrated panther who had hitherto shown himself superior to all the hunter's wiles. He resided in the Mánd Nala, a perennial stream flowing from Nepal through the forest lands of the Bahraich district ; and

issuing forth from his lurking place laid heavy toll on the cattle of the surrounding villagers, who knew him well and predicted that he would never be brought to bag, so great was his cunning. This panther had killed many of our baits without affording us a glimpse of his hide, for he refused to return in daylight, and night shooting is too uncertain in its results to give satisfaction to the sportsman who is fond of the big game and of his rifle.

As we sat crowded in the narrow "machan," which was tied between two thin saplings, we recognized the futility of our proceedings, we thought it impossible that so wily a panther should fail to notice the unusual mass of foliage that marked our position, and listlessly we gave ourselves up to the mercy of the voracious mosquitoes which flourished in this marshy spot.

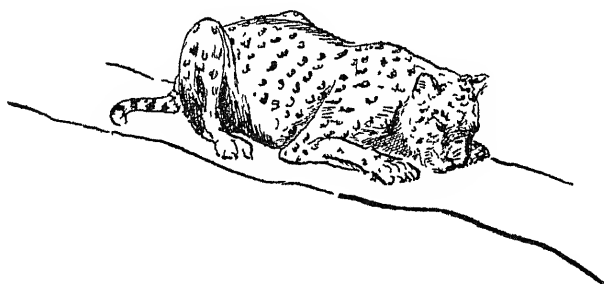
In the distance the alarm cry of the spotted deer awoke us to pleasurable excitement; it seemed probable that the panther was on foot and that his leisurely progress was being heralded by the birds and beasts of the forest as he passed. The jungle fowl scolded when they saw their enemy, and the chorus was taken up by the chattering of the striped squirrels and the angry twitterings of the smaller birds, till

finally the growling of the black-faced monkeys assured us that dangerous game of some sort was afoot. We could see nothing and waited in breathless silence till, as if risen out of the earth, a large male panther stood only a few paces from us. To suddenly raise the rifle would, we knew, result in his instantaneous disappearance ere the trigger could be pulled, and we had perforce to endure the agonies of restraint as we raised the weapon by imperceptible degrees to the firing point. Meanwhile the magnificent animal loitered in towards the "kill"; occasionally he drew back his lips and uttered a little snarl of dissatisfaction as he noted the traces of visitors around his meal; the black-tipped tail twitched incessantly, indicating the latent energy and eagerness of the muscular form; then at last the rifle was ready, and as he slowly emerged from behind the trunk of a tree the bullet struck him behind the shoulder. It was instant death; without a sound he crouched with legs doubled up under his bulky carcase, and we looked our fill at the Mánd panther. Then home, where the tape and scales showed 7 feet 8 inches and nearly 200 lb.

The animal was on exhibition during the following morning, and the interested villagers

flocked in numbers to see the well-known animal. It was curious to note how each man made the same remarks in almost identical language. First recognition and admiration. "Yes, that is the Mánd panther ; he is a very big beast." Then a moral lesson. "If his time had not come no shikari could have slain him ; when one's time comes there is no escape." There seemed to be feelings of regret that so old a neighbour had perished ; of sorrow that one so wise had fallen into so dull a trap.

To the lover of the forest I would say, add to your enjoyments that of the chase of the panther, for it will not be time thrown away. You will learn from him the more intricate ways of the jungle, you will find the pauses in the sport well solaced, not only by the beauty of your surroundings, but also by the success necessary to stimulate your ardour.



CHAPTER XIV

The Wild Buffalo

IN the north of the district of Gorakhpur, where the Gandak River separates the North Western Provinces from Bengal, there existed only a few years ago a small family of wild buffaloes, the remnant of those large herds that formerly roamed over the alluvial plains. They had been persistently pushed back by the spread of civilization and thinned out by cattle disease, to which this species is peculiarly liable, and by constant pursuit by sportsmen of all calibres, so that at the time of which I am writing there were all-told two warrantable bulls, seven cows, and a few calves left to represent the species to the west of the Gandak ; and these, as may be imagined, were as timid and suspicious as might be expected of the last local survivors of a race.

The country is of the most difficult. It is intersected with water-courses whose sluggish currents drain the level Tarai forests ; and

between these streams lie stagnant swamps fringed with tall grasses ; whilst on narrow ridges stand the tree forests, affording in time of floods at least foothold to the wild animals indigenous to this land of moisture. As one proceeds towards the north, where the Himalaya form a barrier of purple and blue, this lake country is gradually left behind, and the waterless tract that extends to the foot of the mountains is entered upon ; a long slope formed of loose débris from the hills above, through which the water percolates far below the surface, to reappear in the level alluvial lands to the south, where saturation and heat combine to favour the growth of the rankest vegetation, with its accompaniments of malaria, rheumatism, and other tropical ailments.

We left the city of Gorakhpur in the early winter, intending to explore the forests in the north of the district ; nor were we or our followers cheered by the farewells of our friends, who were most insistent on the risks we ran from fever, predicting our return as helpless invalids, or a forced retreat owing to mortality amongst our servants. It may at once be said that neither of these ills befell us, and that, owing either to inoculation consequent on

many years of jungle life or to the daily quinine parade, or perhaps to both, we returned a month later to headquarters with no casualties. Both the climate and the marching were, however, sufficiently trying. As the last level rays of the setting sun lighted the lonesome landscape, little wreaths of vapour rose from the dampest spots in the low-lying localities, to coalesce gradually in one dense fog which often covered the earth for many hours ; for the morning sun could with difficulty penetrate the mist, and often the day was far advanced before one could distinguish at any distance more than the most salient features of one's surroundings.

With the sportsman there must always be a longing to pit his endurance and cunning against that of any animal in his neighbourhood ; but he can also readily refrain from aiding in the extermination of a species, if others, too, are honestly interested in the matter. When, however, the reticence of one individual cannot avail to avert the evil day ; when on every hand there are hunters fired with the ambition of securing a trophy, in the present so rare, in the future unobtainable, then even the naturalist may be forgiven for falling into temptation and entering with zest into the pursuit of a noble

and difficult quarry. The local shikaris appeared, indeed, most ready to assist in locating the small herd of buffaloes, but after several expeditions in their company it became evident that they looked upon these animals as a certain source of income, and, whilst ready to accept an engagement to follow them up, were careful not to bring their employer within striking distance of the game. This being a common trick played on the uninitiated in India they were dismissed, with the promise, however, of a reward of one hundred rupees should they think fit at any time to bring us within sporting distance of a bull. They followed the camp, however, probably with the intention to prevent, as far as possible, any successful intrusion on their hunting grounds.

With my own trackers I then recommenced work and soon discovered the whereabouts of the herd ; then followed many days of weary questing. To rise at 2 a.m. and proceed sleepily through the black forest, to lie for hours on the wet grass in the hope that at dawn the buffaloes would pass on their return from grazing, to tramp for miles at noon in order to approach the midday resting place, painfully crawling through the undergrowth ; these were

attempts in each case rendered abortive by the keen scent and hearing of the vigilant animals. Yet was this persistence at times rewarded by a glimpse of massive forms passing far out of reach over the misty plains, by hearing the wild rush through the jungle as our approach was detected ; whilst at all times there was the joy of the forest life, the beauty of the scenery, and the hope of success.

In those days we learnt all there was to know about these buffaloes, of their habits and of their suspicions ; but no more time could be spent in their company. We had already reached the farthest north of our tour and were encamped on a grassy plain whence the snow-clad mountains were grandly evident in the yellows of the rising sun and the pinks and purples of evening. A few antelope roamed these savannahs, keeping, as is the wont of this species, carefully out of rifle shot. In the forests around numerous herds of spotted deer still endeavoured to evade the persistent native hunters from Nepal, and it was on the last evening of our stay, before we again turned our faces to the south, that we wandered forth, mounted on an elephant and conducted by a deaf mahout, to take an evening stroll.

We at first amused ourselves by experimenting on the antelope, proving how close they would allow us to approach ; then the startled cry of the spotted deer echoed through the neighbouring forest, followed by the hoarse cough of a panther who had evidently missed his prey and been detected by the herd. We accepted the invitation, and slowly entered a glade where clumps of high grass stood sheltered by the tall trees on either side. The sun was setting, and in the watery light of the winter evening the bright green of the grass in the open stood out vividly against the darkening gloom of the forest. There were no spotted deer nor panther visible, but, as we passed, a buffalo bull sprang from his lair, and with one agile bound, remarkable in so heavy an animal, reached the edge of the forest, and there turning regarded us with defiant stare. The mahout murmured " Wild buffalo ! What a chance ! " and sat motionless with clasped hands, whilst we from a distance of about fifteen yards enjoyed, perhaps, an unparalleled opportunity of gazing at this magnificent creature as he stood in the open. We marked his great height and his massive body, supported on clean-cut and comparatively slender limbs, the deep

black of his hide set off by the golden brown of the legs below the knees, the polished hoofs, the shaggy head crowned with a circle of black and pointed horns, under whose shade the bright eyes glistened full of intelligence and ferocity.

And then we considered our position, seated loosely on the elephant without the firm railings of a howdah to restrain any sudden tendency to fall from our steed ; armed only with a light .500 express rifle with expanding bullets of the mildest type, and finally at the mercy of an elephant we were unacquainted with, controlled by a driver who could not hear reason if he would. But the chance was one of a lifetime, and we decided to take all risks of charging buffalo and runaway elephant rather than let it slip. Quietly we pressed the elephant to one side in the attempt to obtain a vital shot at neck or shoulder, but each movement was followed by a snort and a change of front by the bull ; he seemed determined to stand his ground, and presented nothing but a sloping forehead and a pair of horizontal horns to the intruders. Thus for minutes that seemed hours we waited for the opening of hostilities, regretting indeed the heavy rifle left behind in camp, but delighted

with the sight presented to us and full of admiration for this courageous buffalo who might at any moment have fled unharmed to the forest depths, but refused to turn his back on the hunter. Then to terminate the suspense I fired at the centre of the forehead below the base of the horn, and to our astonishment the huge bull sank slowly to its knees and rolling over lay motionless. Standing over the prostrate form, and not believing that the bullet could have penetrated the massive frontal bone, I fired two more shots at the throat, but there was no response, the bull was stone dead, and we suddenly realized that we had been fortunate enough to secure a magnificent trophy. Late that evening, a procession crossed the plain in the pale moonlight ; a creaking cart, drawn by many bullocks, conveyed one of the last of his race from the jungles, where generations of his forefathers had flourished ; the excitement of the chase had passed away and we thought regretfully, as we listened to the boastful rabble that formed the funeral procession, that we had been instrumental in removing from these forests the best example they held of strength and courage.

The bull was in the prime of life, with perfect

horns measuring about eight feet round the curve, sharp and tapering ; but it was not till the tough skin of head and neck had been removed that the effects of the bullets could be ascertained. The first had cut a perfect oval out of the frontal bone and exploded in the brain, the others had harmlessly expanded in the skin of the neck which was over an inch thick. There was joy in the camp, save amongst the local shikaris who had lost both their reward and their buffalo ; the deaf mahout sat, interminably relating his adventures over the camp fire, indifferent to his audience and unassailable in his infirmity to the objections raised, as his narrative became more and more remarkable with each repetition.

In the morning parties of natives crossed the plain in single file bearing burdens of fresh meat, whilst on and around the carcass sat flocks of vultures, some gorged to stupidity, others still flapping hungrily as each load of meat was made up and removed from their reach.

CHAPTER XV

How John Nestall escaped the Elephant

IT is but a few months ago that John Nestall¹ was the picture of health and vigour ; his iron nerve and splendid physique were the envy of many who had spent more years than he in the enervating climate of Burma. To-day he seems to be listless and gloomy, his hair is streaked with grey. He is nervous in the extreme, and takes no interest in sport ; indeed, whereas formerly all his conversation was of big game, he now changes the subject or leaves the room when the talk threatens to take a sporting turn. His friends speak of him as " poor Nestall ! " and fear that he will never be the same man again ; but their verdict is probably the outcome of the well-known pessimism of friendship which entitles one to make the worst of one's comrade's mishaps. In point of fact, it is much more likely that in time

¹ For obvious reasons, this name is not the real one.

his nerves will resume their tone, and that he will be as enthusiastic as before. I, the recorder of this incident, hazard this opinion from personal experience, as I also was once reduced to an almost similar condition, the result of an unfortunate encounter with a tiger. Yet I recovered sufficiently to again enjoy sport which had temporarily become a terror to me.

It happened in this way. Nestall, accompanied by two friends—the three mounted on a couple of elephants—was proceeding in the course of his duties through the dense mountain forests of Upper Burma, when the track of wild elephants was observed. In that country time is not of much moment, and during eight or nine months of the year you live a jungle life. Supplied with a few of the necessities, but none of the comforts, of existence, you wander through pathless forests, your nightly shelter being a “lean-to” of bamboos covered with a tarpaulin; your food, eggs and fowls, if you happen to come across the scattered villages, and if not, then only the meat the forest provides to season the “damper” or rice which forms the staple sustenance of yourself and your followers.

Thus, when elephants were discovered in the

vicinity it meant, first, sport ; secondly, perhaps a valuable trophy ; and, lastly, meat for the whole camp. With these incentives it is not surprising that Nestall should have decided on following the trail and endeavouring to secure one of the herd.

So long as absolute silence is maintained and the approach is made up-wind, nothing is easier than to arrive within shooting distance of wild elephants when the sportsman is mounted on a trained animal. You see, the intruder is mistaken for one of the herd, and the noise made in crashing through the jungle is not so alarming as the stealthy approach of man or beast ; for any attempt at secrecy is invariably the signal for distrust. In these circumstances it may well be imagined that no long period elapsed before the herd was sighted, and it was found to comprise, besides some ten or twelve females and calves, a male of noble proportions and warrantable tusks. Unfortunately, however, when manœuvring to secure a shot at close quarters the elephants got the wind of the sportsmen, and, as is usual in the case of an unknown danger, the leader of the herd advanced to reconnoitre and, if necessary, defend his precious charge.

The most carefully-trained elephants can never be said to be quite trustworthy ; they are liable to sudden fits of nervousness when there may be no real cause for alarm, whereas actual danger would probably be met without flinching. Such a *contretemps* took place on this occasion, and resulted in a senseless stampede, the wild tusker, attracted by the commotion and determined to make the intruders pay dearly for their temerity, following heavily in the rear. In the frenzied rush through the dense forest Nestall was swept off his mount by an overhanging branch, and found himself, happily unhurt, though much shaken, defenceless on the ground. On the one hand could be heard the clatter of his departing comrades, and on the other the advance of the infuriated wild elephant of great proportions. It says much for Nestall's presence of mind that, dazed as he was, he at once grasped the situation and recognized that safety lay not only in ascending a tree, but also in selecting a stem of suitable thickness from whence he might in confidence await the onslaught of his foe and haply also the return of a rescuing party. Near at hand he espied the dead trunk of a large tree, and separated from it only by a foot

or two stood a sapling of convenient size for climbing. In a moment (one's brain works rapidly at such times) Nestall had swarmed up the sapling and sat, at a height of some fifteen feet from the ground, on the edge of the dry stump, which he now for the first time ascertained to be hollow.

His position even now was not an enviable one, for he was exposed to the heat of the afternoon sun while the tusker was questing around in the vicinity searching for his victim. Nestall was also worried by the knowledge that it might be long before the stampede of the trained elephants could be stopped, and further, that even then it might be too dark to take up the return trail to his assistance. Therefore he realized that he might well be forced to pass the night in his present position without food or sufficient clothing, and suffering also from the effects of his fall, which now began to cause him some inconvenience. His mind, however, was speedily diverted from these thoughts by the arrival of the tusker under the tree; and whether it was the moral shock of mutual recognition or that physically produced by a furious charge on the sapling—or perhaps both combined—the result was that Nestall lost his

balance and fell, not to certain death on the earth below, but into the hollow tree, where he found himself in temporary security.

For some moments Nestall congratulated himself on his fortunate escape, and struck by the humour of the position amused himself by picturing the astonishment of his friends on their return, and the rage and wonderment of the tusker outside, who was continuing his search for the enemy who had so miraculously disappeared. By degrees, however, as the excitement wore off and he began to feel wearied and sore from his unusual experiences, the prisoner found his forced confinement irksome and wished for some way of escape. He learnt that the soil on which he stood was composed of masses of rotten wood and fungus which raised him above the earth level, but still not sufficiently to enable him to reach, either by stretching or jumping, any hold for his hands on the edge of the trunk. He then endeavoured to pile the débris of decaying wood to one side so as gradually to raise himself to the requisite height ; but in this attempt after many efforts he remained unsuccessful, for the standing room was so limited that there was no space to build a mound large enough for his require-

ments. Up till now he had not thought seriously of his position, but when it dawned upon him that without help there could be no exit from this living tomb the depression and terror which suddenly overwhelmed him amounted almost to despair. But not for long did he give way.

The sun was now setting, and the forest was deathlike in its stillness ; the air became cold and damp, and, to add to the pangs of hunger and thirst which now commenced to assail him, he had to contend against the pain of bruises, which during the first excitement he had hardly noticed. Knowing that it would be useless to waste his strength in futile endeavours to escape from his prison, he decided to lose no chance, but to pass the night wakefully, shouting at intervals, though he had faint hope that he could be relieved before daylight, or that the sound of his voice would penetrate far into the forest.

It is needless for me to enlarge on the terrors of that time ; briefly it may be stated that alternate periods of despair and hope—the latter growing shorter as his strength failed in the struggle against cold and pain—were happily followed by the sleep of exhaustion,

When Nestall awoke the day had broken and a new fear gripped his heart. Had his companions returned and passed him by when sleeping? In a frenzy he shouted and beat his prison walls with hands and feet till obliged from weakness to desist. Then he felt indifferent to his fate and passed hours in a state of exhaustion and stupor which he mistook for resignation. That it was not so was proved when at noon the sun poured its vertical rays upon him; the intense heat aggravating all his sufferings, which now became intolerable. Then, once more rebelling against his fate, he wasted his strength and energy in despairing efforts for freedom, leaping against the side of the tree, clinging with bleeding hands to any small projection, but only to fall back time after time, and finally to acknowledge that his fate was stronger than he.

It was late that afternoon when his dulled senses first heard in the distance the tones of wooden bells which in Burma all trained elephants carry suspended from their necks. The sound came as might a sudden reprieve to a wretch about to suffer at the hands of the executioner; but the revival of hope was almost as much of a shock as had been in the

first instance the recognition of his hopeless position. Again he had to pass through the agony of uncertainty. Would his friends arrive within saving distance of his prison? Would they hear his feeble cries for assistance? He determined to wait—to husband his strength; to shout only when he judged that his rescuers were near enough to hear him. Meanwhile the sonorous tones of the wooden bells continued, and even appeared to come closer and closer—then ceased altogether! Evidently a halt had been called and matters were being discussed. When the sounds were resumed they appeared to Nestall to be fainter; he listened intently, and in a few seconds was convinced of this fact.

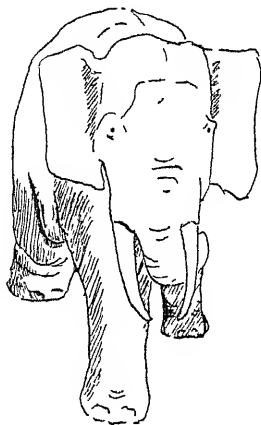
He knew then that his life depended on the results of the next few minutes; he shouted again and again for help until his cries died away in almost inarticulate moans of despair; then he remembered nothing more till he awoke to find himself lying in the shady forest, whilst his friends were applying the simple remedies they possessed in the endeavour to restore him to consciousness. It was far into the night before they reached their little camp, and Nestall sank into a sleep, broken all too fre-

quently by sudden awakenings to the horror of despair till he recalled the circumstances of his escape and present safety.

The delay in his rescue was readily explained. The stampede of the elephants had not been arrested till dusk ; the night was spent in endeavouring to find the position of the camp, and it was not till nearly noon that a start had been made laboriously to follow up the trail of the previous day. The cries uttered by Nestall as he listened to the sound of the retreating elephants had been faintly heard ; they had ceased ere his friends reached his place of confinement, and it was merely a lucky chance that induced them to examine the hollow trunk. A hat lying at its foot, a shred of clothing above, had suggested a more detailed investigation, with the happy result that Nestall had been extracted from his prison and restored again to liberty.

Such are the facts of Nestall's case. There are those who smile at its recital—who point out that his sufferings were due merely to the want of mental control ; that he would equally soon have been saved if he had not given way to his fears. To such arguments no answer is possible, but when listening to them one may

be excused for believing that had these critics been placed in similar circumstances—nay, if they had been even left solitary to wander these vast forests—they would not have extricated themselves without even more serious consequences.



CHAPTER XVI

Daphne and the Demon

A FAIRY TALE

ONCE upon a time there was a little girl who lived with her father and mother in a tiny house in a clearing in a vast jungle. The house was raised from the ground on strong posts, so high that one had to climb up a ladder to reach the verandah, and it was all built of bamboos and grass. The walls and floors were of thick matting made of bamboo, and the roof was of grass, so that when the autumn storm came the little house trembled and even swayed about in its anxiety to escape the wind ; but happily no rain came inside, even after it had been raining for days together, and though there was perhaps a foot of water and mud beneath the floor.

There were a few other houses in the village, but they were all on the same pattern ; and surrounding these few poor little huts was a fence of bamboos with prickly spikes sticking

out, which kept off all the wild animals. At night you could hear them prowling round the village and grunting quite angrily when they always found that strong fence between them and the young calves inside.

Sometimes, too, robbers from savage tribes in the higher hills came down to steal and kill, and then all the men, and a good many of the women too, went out with knives and spears and kept them from breaking through the bamboo wall; they were fighting for their cattle, even for their lives, and so they generally managed to drive off the robbers with more or less loss.

Outside the village was the dense dark forest where all kinds of wild animals roamed: elephants, tigers, bears, wild bulls, pigs and a great many others; but besides all these there were fairies and demons who lived in these solitary hills, and these were perhaps more to be feared than the wild beasts.

You must not think of these forests as like the woods in England where you see sunshine all day, and flowers are glad to grow because it is cool and there is light enough to see and be seen. In the forests around this little girl's home the trees were so high that your hat fell

off when you looked up to their tops, and if you went on looking your neck got so stiff that you could not bend it back again ; and at the same time the bamboos grew so thick that it always seemed evening there. In the least breeze they swayed about and waved their arms as if they longed to get away and could not, because they were prisoners.

Then too there were deep valleys, full of rocks, where little streams wandered along as they liked ; yet they also seemed in a hurry to get away, and as soon as the rain helped them a little they hustled and bustled and got quite white with foam in their eagerness to leave the dark forest and reach the big rivers, and so flow into the sea where all good rivers love to go.

So you see everything that could get away did so as soon as possible, except perhaps the animals and the fairies. Of these even the animals did not always remain there ; they wandered around for miles, and when they felt it hot in the plains they climbed up the hills and lay there in the cool shade quite safe from all dangers. The fairies too only stayed when the weather was fine, because they love to be cheerful and happy, and that was impossible when the damp mists are over the earth and the

hot sun shines on the mist till you feel as if you were being slowly boiled.

The demons stayed there all the time ; they, you know, are just bad fairies, or sometimes they are not even really bad but only cross and sulky. When a fairy gets out of temper it takes him a long time to get well again, because then he goes away alone, and, choosing a tall shady tree, he sits solitary in the top of it and having no one to cheer him up he gets crosser and crosser till he may become quite unbearable.

Just such a demon there was in the highest tree outside that little girl's village. He had been there for years and had got so ill-tempered that he had often done spiteful things to the villagers ; hurting their cattle or pulling up the thatch just before it began to rain, or giving some of the villagers fever.

So, of course, they were very much afraid of him, and as they could not force him to go away they did the next best thing by trying to improve him. They built him a little thatched hut under the tree for him to sit in when it was hot, and they put a little table outside near the hut, and they fenced the tree all round to keep out the wild animals. And more than that they placed each day a little food and fresh

water and flowers on the table, and when they went past the tree they bowed and hoped he had had a good night !

This soothed that demon, and after some time he began to look with interest when the little girl brought him his food each evening and his fresh water and flowers every morning ; and she, though she could not see him high up in his leafy tree, felt sorry for him because he was lonely and she was lonely too.

You know there's nothing like feeling unhappy yourself to make you sorry for the aches and pains of others, and so though she did not know it at the time this little girl was gradually learning to sympathize with others, and as soon as we begin to do that why the others begin to love us, and then we feel that life is good and happy in spite of occasional sadness.

That little girl's name was Daphne, and it may seem strange to you, but she didn't love her father and mother very much. I suspect that was because they did not take much notice of her. They gave her an old skirt to wear and a part of their daily food of rice and fish, and they made her work a little in the house and in the fields ; but she was very lonely.

In the winter when the days are short she

would sit in the corner of the hut warming herself over a few embers in an earthen crock, listening to the dew dropping from the trees, and to the wind whistling wearily through the branches ; in the summer when the nights were hot she lay out in the verandah and watched the moonlight in the forest trees ; it turned some of the leaves into silver, and some it made as black as ink.

She didn't then understand that it was the same with leaves as it is with all children and grown-up people, for the moonshine represents happiness and joy, and if we turn towards the light and happiness then our faces and lives are bright ; whilst if we turn away in discontent then everything seems black. Daphne had to learn this just as you or I have to learn it some time or other, and the quicker we do this the better for us, for the light is always there and it rests with us to take the happiness if we like.

Perhaps you will ask why Daphne was always so lonely ; there were other children in the village, why did she not play with them ? But it so happened that the other children would not play with her, and as she was often spoken of in their language as " The White Stranger " so she remained in reality a stranger amongst

the other children. These were content with the life around them though they had no toys to play with and nothing that you and other children have as a matter of course. But Daphne always felt as if something was wanting in her life ; perhaps she missed the love and sympathy of those around her, for, as I have said before, if people do not understand us how can we get on and do our best.

The reason that the other children did not care to play with Daphne was because she was different to them. She was, to begin with, much whiter though perhaps you would not notice this at first as she was so dirty ; she did not even know it herself as she had no looking-glass, and warm water and soap she had never heard of ! Her hair, instead of being black and shiny with oil, was fair and rough ; and when she tried to tie it up in a knot like the other girls it just came undone in about five minutes, and this annoyed her very much, for, as you know, it is very trying to be different from those around us. We want to be all alike even though it does not suit us a bit.

Then, too, Daphne was always thinking of things which she imagined to herself, and in these dreams she was generally living with

people more like herself, where instead of being dirty and half naked she was well dressed, and those around her took great care of her ; so that as time went on she became more and more solitary, until one evening, after she had put food on the demon's table, she sat down under his tree and sobbed bitterly.

She must have been there a long time for the sun had set, and there was just a long streak of light quivering low down through the forest trees ; the owls had woke up and were hooting to each other ; the night-jars were fluttering around calling " tonk," " tonk " ; the tree crickets were singing as loud as they could ; and in the distance you could hear the wild elephants breaking down branches for their calves, who were running about squeaking and trumpeting.

Daphne should have been inside the village fence long ago, for it was not safe for her alone at that hour in the jungle, but she just sat there and sobbed till she heard a voice calling her name from the tree above and asking what ailed her ? Then, just as little girls will do, she only sobbed the louder and hid her face in her hands and would not answer.

The demon, when he saw that, came slowly

down the tree, making as much noise as he could, and showing as little of himself as possible, for he did not wish to frighten Daphne and he knew that she would be looking out between her fingers, though pretending she did not care a bit.

In truth he was very ugly, much more like a bat than a fairy ; his wings and his body were black instead of white and shiny, for he had been looking on the dark side of things for years and had become blacker and blacker as time went on. This was actually the first time he had thought about anyone but himself for ages, and it felt rather nice.

So when he had shown himself by degrees and saw that Daphne was not frightened, he came and sat in his little house opposite the girl and they talked of many things ; for they were both unhappy. The demon wished to return again to the fairies but could not go as long as he was black, and Daphne, she did not know what she wished, save to get away from herself and her unhappiness.

After that evening Daphne and the demon met often, and were constantly making plans for the future, how they would leave that dreary forest and go they hardly knew where,

but still they stayed on because you know some people want to be pushed *very, very* hard before they will take the trouble to exert themselves !

Now in the village they had noticed that Daphne sat frequently under the demon's tree, and she had been heard talking as if to herself, for the demon made himself quite invisible to all others. The villagers were frightened and thought that Daphne was bewitched, and, lest she should bring them ill luck, they talked of killing her.

Fortunately, however, her father and mother were able to prevent this, but they had to consent to the little girl being turned out into the forest to die, and so giving her a little food in a wallet the villagers opened the gate in the fence, and pushing her outside they shut and fastened the door behind her.

Of course she went straight to the demon's tree for she had no other friend. During all the time they had known and thought of each other some small changes had come over both of them ; the demon had a few white feathers here and there which showed up against the black of his wings and face and Daphne was cleaner and brighter too, for she had found

some interest in life, and so she actually forgot herself for hours at a time.

So these two went away hand in hand towards the south. In the south we all expect to find comfort and hospitality; and in the north we know that there are just ranges and ranges of mountains where it gets colder and colder until at last we step out on to vast plains of snow and ice where one is frozen to death. There is not much good going to the north, you see, unless you do it in moderation.

They two wandered on keeping the sun in their faces and so looking on the bright side of things; and for the demon it was not such hard work at first, for he could fly and climb as well as any bird or squirrel, whilst Daphne laboured painfully along with her bare feet wounded by the rocks and thorns, and so tired that she did not know what to do. If it had not been that after the first day or two the demon helped her each hour and minute till he himself was so fatigued that he ached all over, I don't think she would ever have left those jungles alive.

For a whole month they journeyed on, sleeping in trees at night, living on berries and roots, till the forest streams grew broader and

broader and at last one day they stood on the banks of a big river so deep that it could not be crossed.

Then it was that, coming out of the dark forest, Daphne noticed that the demon instead of being black and ugly was quite silvery grey in colour, indeed, part of his plumage was pure white, and his face was now not ugly but just what you call plain, which you know is neither beautiful nor ugly, but may be either just according as to whether beautiful or ugly thoughts are passing through your mind !

And the demon, too, looked at his companion, and saw that she was fairer, and they wondered, for they did not know that thought for others, in fact unselfishness, had gradually brightened their souls, causing them also gradually to forget their own discontent in trying to help each other. You see, already they were on the road to happiness, and so already joy was reflected in their faces from their minds.

They travelled slowly down the river banks, for the way was rough and difficult ; often they were lost in the tall grasses which waved high over their heads ; often they had to wade painfully across swamps where all kinds of horrid snakes, toads and other animals lived.

Yet as they went on, and each thought only of aiding the other, they grew whiter and whiter until one evening they arrived in the open country and lay down to rest under the shelter of some mango trees.

The moon was shining so softly over the fields, making the dewdrops sparkle like diamonds on the grass ; and as they slept they heard the sound of sweet music coming nearer and nearer till at last they woke and sat up in astonishment.

And what do you think they saw ! There on the little lawn in front of the mango trees was a group of fairies singing and dancing in the moonlight ; as they turned with nimble feet sometimes they seemed white, and sometimes pink and pale blue and all colours except black ; there was nothing to make you afraid or unhappy in watching them, you just felt inclined to sit quiet and wish they might go on for ever.

But after a while the demon arose and walked slowly towards the group. You could see now that he too was pure white and beautiful, and as he joined the other fairies his plumage was lovely, like theirs, shining iridescent in the moon.

Daphne felt a pang at her heart, for she

thought that she alone was unchanged, that the fairies would leave her, and that although she had succeeded in escaping from the forest yet she would be still solitary in the new country she had reached.

But there was no need for her sorrow. Already the fairies were raising her in their arms and carrying her swiftly through the air till at daybreak they put her down softly, and from where she lay she saw white tents shining in the morning sun.

In the door of one of these tents sat a lady ; she was crying softly to herself because, though it was many years ago since she had lost her little girl in the jungles, yet she had never forgotten her ; and secretly, though she told no one, she still had hopes that the child might be alive and not torn by wild beasts or dead of starvation and fear.

Daphne was fascinated with the gentleness on this lady's face ; and, because she could now see no one in trouble without trying to help them, she walked fearlessly towards the tent door.

I think now you can end the story for yourself ; you can imagine better than I can tell how the lady clasped her long lost child in her

arms ; how the father too came to welcome his child home again, and how thus Daphne reached home and happiness at last.

You may be sure she never forgot her strange adventures in the jungles, and as she grew up, surrounded with love and sympathy, she also understood that there can be no contentment in thinking of oneself only, but that happiness comes to us when we try to make others happy.

